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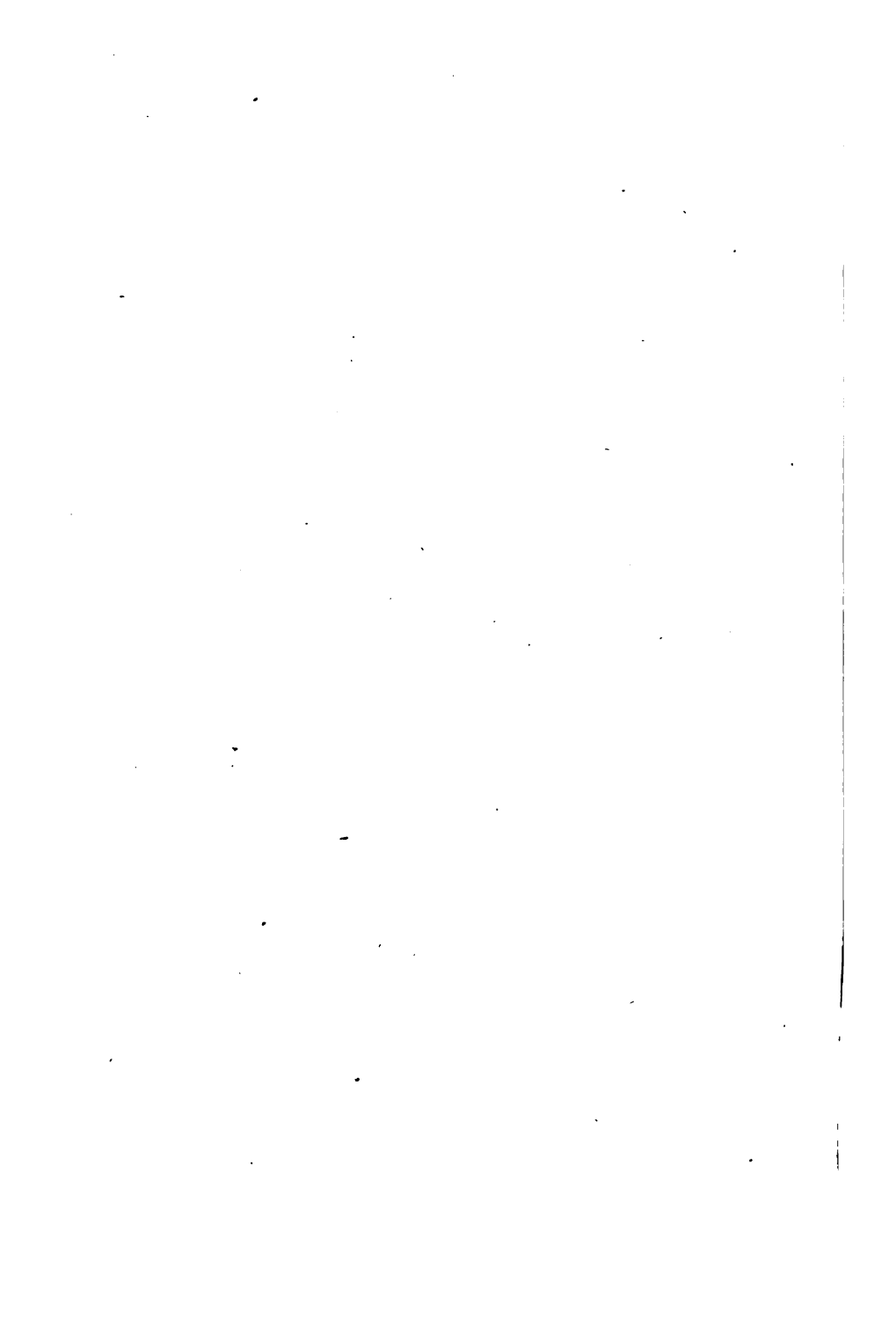
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THE OLD FACTORY



THE OLD FACTORY

A Lancashire Story

BY

WILLIAM WESTALL

AUTHOR OF "LARRY LOHENGRIIN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III



London

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND, W.C.

1881

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251. i. 394.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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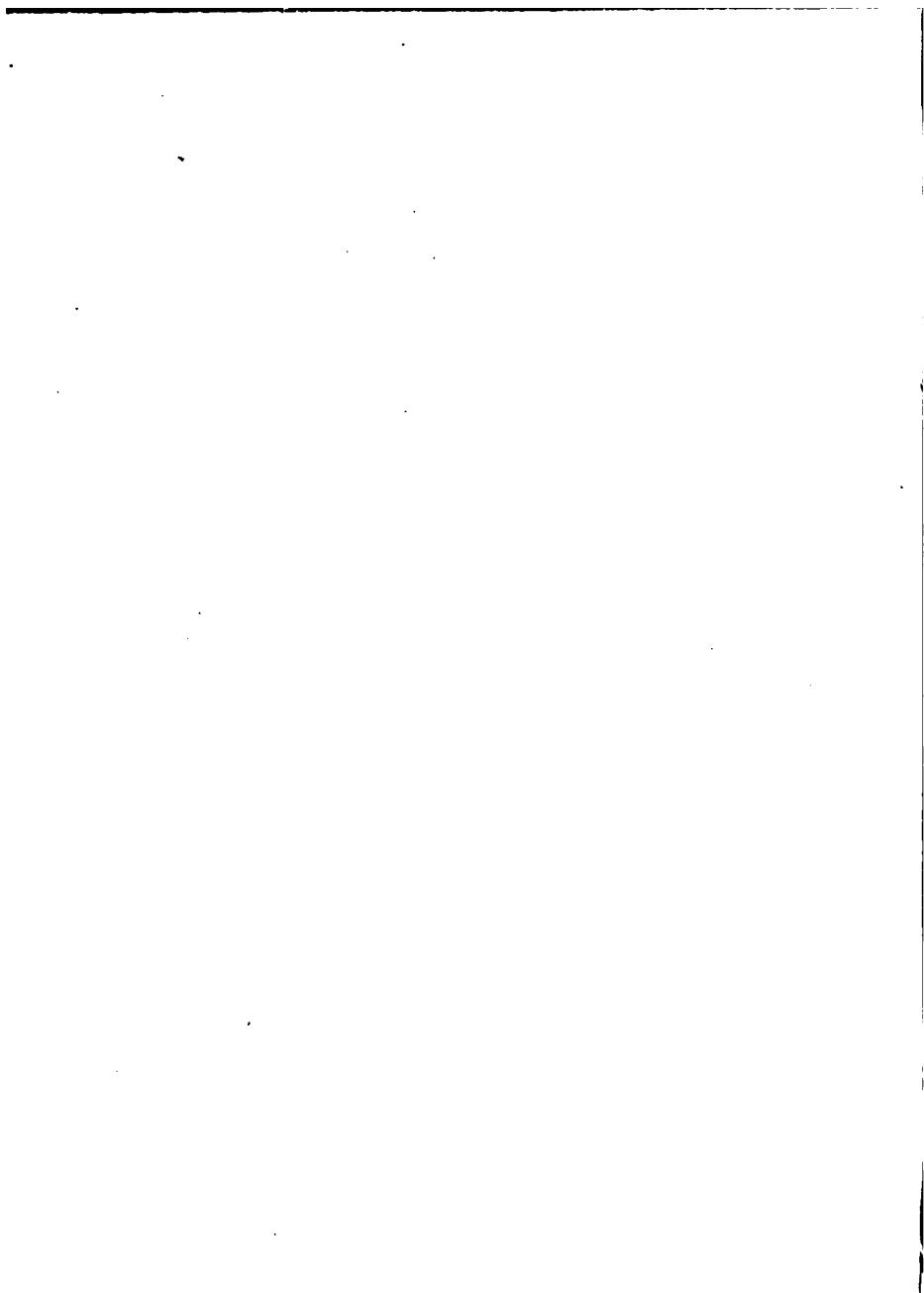
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THE OLD FACTORY.

CHAPTER I.

FORGET ME NOT.

FOR some time after the fire Adam was utterly prostrated. He passed the greater part of the day in silence, and seemed equally indifferent to business and incapable of consecutive thought. So far from finding Frank alive among the ruins of the Old Factory, he had not even the sorry satisfaction of finding his charred remains, nor anything that belonged to him. A funeral was, therefore, out of the question, and, there being nobody to bury, all that could be done was to put up commemorative tablets in Claylands Church and Moorside Chapel. People thought

Adam felt the blow more than his wife. In this they were mistaken ; for while his depression arose as much from disappointed hopes and thwarted ambition as from natural grief for the death of his son, Rachel's sorrow was unsoiled with a single thought of self. With a glad heart she would have scattered all their wealth to the winds, and ended her days in a cottage, if by so doing her boy could have been restored to her.

But had such an alternative been put to Adam it is doubtful if he could have accepted it in the same spirit.

He was roused from his despondency by two inquiries which were almost simultaneously addressed to him. One related to the Old Factory—should it be rebuilt or left as it was ?

“Let it be rebuilt,” he answered hastily. This resolution rendered it necessary for him to give orders, consider plans, make bargains. The exertion did him good, and he found in hard work, as many another has found, the best solace for trouble and disappointment.

The second inquiry was put to him by Basel,

and related to a matter in which they had a common interest.

"My wife wanted me to ask you," said his partner one day, "what your ideas are about Mabel and Fritz—would you like the match to be broken off, or are they still to consider themselves engaged?"

"By all means," answered Adam, "why should not they? If poor Frank is dead and gone that is no reason why they should not be married. But it will be a sorrowful wedding, Basel, for you and me."

"And for Valérie," said the other, in a troubled voice. "Poor child, I much fear she will never be herself again. It was a terrible stroke for all of us; but most of all for her. But let us drop the subject for the present—it seems rather out of place yet—and I have other matters to talk to you about. Another time, and when you are so disposed, we can resume it; we understand each other, and that is sufficient for the moment."

This conversation dwelt in Adam's mind, and, after his partner had left him, there grew

out of it an idea that made him for a time almost oblivious to his sorrow. Before the day drew to a close the idea had become a resolve. Frank's death, and the marring of his plans for the founding of a family, had so completely crushed him that, until Basel mooted the subject, he had forgotten all about Mabel and Fritz—almost forgotten, in fact, that he possessed a daughter. In his dreary musings as to how, in the altered circumstances, he should dispose of his property, Adam had hardly given her a thought. It now occurred to him, as if for the first time, that Mabel was as much his child as Frank had been, that her children, as much as his might have been, would be his grandchildren.

“They shall be wed,” he said to himself, striking his fist on the table before him, “and soon; and I'll leave everything, except forty or fifty thousand for Mabel, to their eldest lad; and, failing him, to the next, and he shall be called Frank Blackthorne. Brandwood shall be entailed on him. I shall, maybe, live till he's grown up; I have fifteen or twenty years of life and work in me yet—I know I have. I wonder

I never thought of it before. It would have saved me some trouble if I had. Poor Frank, poor lad, if he had only been spared !”

When he went home he told Rachel what had passed between Basel and himself, and, without disclosing his new plan, concluded by saying that he should like the marriage to take place soon. Though rather surprised, she offered no objection.

“Perhaps it might be for the best,” she remarked. Life was uncertain; they were getting into years, and whichever of them might be taken first it was well that Mabel should be settled while they were both there to look after her.

The only conditions she made were that the wedding should be very, very quiet, and delayed by a month or two beyond the time originally fixed for the double ceremony.

Adam next spoke to the Basels, and as they desired nothing better than to fall in with his wishes, it was arranged that Fritz and Mabel should be married early in April, which would be rather more than four months after Frank’s death,

and that in order to ensure complete privacy, a special licence should be obtained from the Bishop and the ceremony performed at Brandwood Hall, nobody being present save the officiating clergyman, the members of the two families, and Mr. Hartwell. The young couple were to live in the house which Adam had built in Brandwood Park for Frank and Valérie; and in order to leave no doubt of his intentions, a deed was drawn up settling all his real estate on the first son born of the marriage, on condition that he should bear the name of Francis Adam Blackthorne, the rent and interest to accumulate until he was twenty-five (in the event of his grandfather dying before the child attained that age), subject to a charge in favour of Mrs. Blackthorne. The contingency of Fritz and Mabel being sonless was also provided for. In the event of no male child of the marriage being in existence fifteen years after Adam's death, the property, subject to any charges which he might meanwhile make upon it, was to pass absolutely to his daughter for her separate use.

In effect this was Adam's will, so far as con-

cerned his real estate, and inasmuch as the instrument did not partake of the nature of a contract—no consideration having passed—it was revocable; but as it formulated a deliberate, and even a solemn, declaration of his intentions, the arrangement was regarded as final. It seemed, therefore, in the highest degree probable that Fritz Basel's wife and children would inherit the whole of Adam Blackthorne's vast wealth (it went without saying that Mabel would take all the personalty), a prospect which so greatly pleased Mrs. Basel that she began in her secret thoughts to look upon Frank's death as being not altogether an unmitigated misfortune. True, it was bad for Valérie, but time would cure her of her delusion, and with the settlements that Hermann could make (now that Fritz was being so amply provided for) a very fine marriage might be arranged for her.

Meanwhile it was necessary that Valérie should be informed of the approaching marriage, of which, out of a natural desire to spare her pain, she had been kept as long as possible ignorant; and, as her mother did not feel equal

to the task, it was entrusted to Mabel, whose quiet common sense had latterly brought her rather frequently to the front. Even her father was beginning to find out that Mabel was a sensible lass, and since Frank's death he had taken her much into his confidence.

In truth she had more sense than sentiment, and when she was requested to break the news of the coming event to her friend she saw no impropriety in the arrangement, nor any reason why she should not make the communication at once and without circumlocution. Valérie, she felt persuaded, would not feel hurt or aggrieved because Fritz and herself, in deference to the wishes of their parents, were going to be married. Her brother's sad death had deeply affected her, and she still mourned and often wept for him; but his untimely end was, after all, no reason why she should not marry, and her remaining single a few months longer—even if she could do so without disobeying her father—would neither restore Frank to life nor do him any good where he was.

“You will find her at the farther end of the

garden, in the Lady's Walk," said Mrs. Basel to Mabel, when the latter called to make the announcement. "She likes it, I think, because Frank and she used often to walk there together. But do not mention his name, please, if you can possibly help it, and if she says—as she is sure to say—that Frank will come back, you must not contradict her. The doctor told us on no account to contradict or irritate her, and that if we avoided doing so she would recover in time. We had him here again last week. Valérie, poor child, had no idea that he was not a business friend of Hermann's. He does not think she is any worse, or that your marriage is likely to do her any harm. On the contrary, it may rouse her, and help to cure her of her illusion. When you and Fritz are married, and Frank does not return to her—as she keeps hoping and thinking that he will—and time goes on, she must believe at last, you know, that he has gone to a place, poor young man, that one never returns from; and that in this world she never, never can see him again. It is very touching, my dear, this attachment to your brother, and her refusal to

believe that he has lived ; but it is a great misfortune for us all."

Mabel found Valérie, as she expected, pacing to and fro in the Lady's Walk, followed by her faithful companion, the mastiff Broc. Although the bereaved girl's face wore an expression of melancholy which it had never displayed in her happier days, and her cheeks were wan, her friend remarked that her eyes were brighter, and her manner more animated, than they had been lately wont to be. This Mabel looked upon as a good sign, and after a few words of greeting went on to tell her news.

"Can you guess why I have come this morning, Valérie, dear?" she said, putting her arm around her friend's waist, as she walked by her side.

"To see mamma and me, I suppose. Fritz is at the works, you know, or I should perhaps suspect that an incidental object of your visit was to see him."

"Don't be absurd, Valérie. He was at Brandwood only the day before yesterday, and I am not so soft as to want to see him every

day. Besides, if I did, I should certainly not come to see him, I would make him come to see me. Still it is about him that I have come to-day—about him and me, I should say.”

“Poor Fritz, what has he done—has he vexed you?”

“Oh dear, no, he knows better than that. He is very good, and as he always does what I tell him, I have rarely occasion to find fault with him. It is nothing of that sort. But papa and the others want us to get married, and——”

“Yes,” said Valérie, attentively, as Mabel seemed rather to hesitate.

“And we are going to be.”

“Soon?”

“On the twenty-fifth. It is rather soon after—after—I mean it is rather sooner than we thought; but papa has taken it into his head that we must be married next month, and when he decides a thing, you know, there is no saying nay.”

“Oh Mabel, dear,” said Valérie reproachfully,

as she placed her hands on her friend's shoulder, "could you not have waited until poor Frank came back?"

"I could wait, certainly. I am not in a hurry. But you see it does not rest with me. Papa will have it so, and you know he's not a man that one can lightly disobey."

"And Frank will be back soon," said Valérie in an excited whisper, without appearing to notice her friend's remark. "Look here, Mabel, I have something to show you. Do you know this locket?"

It was an old-fashioned gold locket, with the words, "FORGET ME NOT," in blue enamel on the back, and "HOPE" on the front.

Mabel regarded it wonderingly. It seemed to her that she had seen it somewhere before.

"Don't you recognise it?" continued the girl in the same excited whisper. "It is the locket Frank bought for me at Leamington, and he took it away with him the—the day before the fire, to have some of my hair and his hair, woven into a true lover's knot, put into it—and see (opening the locket), here it is; that is his hair and that is

mine. And he has sent it to me. It could be nobody else."

"But how?" asked Mabel uneasily, for she was greatly disturbed at this new manifestation of her friend's hallucination.

"I will tell you. We were walking yesterday afternoon, Broc and I, in Throstle Nest Wood, and when we reached the most solitary part of it, near the grove of beech trees, you know, the dog started forward, and I noticed an old woman in the path before me. As there was nothing to fear from an old woman, I called Broc in and went forward. The old body, who was very dark-complexioned and queerly dressed, and evidently a stranger in these parts, seemed to want to speak to me; so when we met I stopped and made some commonplace remark about the weather.

"'Yes,' she answered, looking at me strangely with her black eyes, 'it is very nice weather for people who have to sleep in the woods and are always afoot. I am a very old woman, but I have never slept in a house in my life, and every year I walk from one end of England to the

other. But will you not let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady? I can read the stars; give me a piece of silver and you shall know something that will make you happy.'

"'No, thank you, my good woman,' I said, 'I don't believe in fortune telling. God alone knows what will befall us in the future, but here is a piece of silver for you, all the same,' and I gave her a shilling.

"'You are a kind lady, Miss Valérie Basel,' she answered, 'and whether I can tell your fortune or not, I will tell you something before we part that will make you cross my palm with gold.'

"'How do you know my name, woman?' I asked, very much surprised, as you may well suppose, Mabel.

"'I know more than your name, pretty lady. You love a brave gentleman, and everybody but you thinks he is dead; and because you will not have it that he is dead all your friends think you are mad.'

"Again I was surprised, almost bewildered, indeed, until I remembered that the old gipsy

was only repeating what was probably the talk of the neighbourhood ; and feeling indignant at what I thought was an attempt to impose upon me, I spoke a few sharp words and tried to pass on. Then she put her hand on my arm.

“ ‘Not so fast, my pretty lady,’ she answered, ‘I have not yet told you all I have to say. You are right, and the others are wrong. Your lover is not dead ; he is true to you, and before many days you will see him again. Behold the proof.’

“And then she showed me the locket. I knew it at once—knew it before I read the words on the back and the front, and saw Frank’s hair inside. For a few minutes I forgot everything. I think I must have fainted ; for when I recovered my senses the old woman was supporting me in her arms.

“ ‘Give me the locket,’ I exclaimed ; ‘oh, give it me,’ and I snatched it from her hand. I asked her where she had got it ; where Frank was. I offered her money to tell me—twenty pounds, a hundred pounds, anything—but she would not.

“ ‘I cannot, my pretty lady. Not all the

money in the world would buy the secret. One day you will know all, but you must wait. Read what is written on the golden locket and be of good courage. That is my message; and now I must go. Mayhap, before long you may see me again.'"

"And then?" asked Mabel, after waiting a minute or two for Valérie to continue her story.

"That is all; she went away."

"Not before you had crossed her hand with a piece of gold, I suppose," observed Mabel with a slight touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"I gave her a sovereign," said Valérie, whose excitement seemed to be merging into listlessness. "Could I have done less when she brought me news of poor Frank?"

"And will bring you plenty more at the same price, and equally true," would have been Mabel's answer, if, remembering Mrs. Basel's caution, she had not checked herself; saying instead, "I hope she told the truth."

"I am sure she did," rejoined Valérie, whose excitement this remark appeared again to kindle. "Have we not the locket in evidence? She must

have told the truth ; there can be no mistake. But I do not ask anyone to believe if they do not want to believe—and I can see mamma and papa do not—so I would not tell them, and I have only told you because you are Frank's sister."

As Mabel felt that she could not answer Valérie without contradicting her, she did not answer at all ; and they walked in silence towards the Châlet, where the friends separated, Miss Blackthorne declaring that she had so much to do at home that she could not possibly remain to luncheon.

When her pony-carriage reached the lodge gates, however, she ordered the coachman to drive on to Moorwell ; for albeit she did not believe the gipsy's tale as related by Valérie, she determined to lose no time in communicating it to Valérie's father.

Mr. Basel received her very kindly, and, though he was very busy, laid aside his work and listened to his future daughter-in-law with great attention.

"Poor child !" he said, with a sigh, when she had finished her story, "it is easy to see how it

is. Some wretched creature has been taking advantage of her weakness—unless it is the coinage of her brain, and she has dreamt or imagined it all.”

“I do not think so, Mr. Basel; she told the tale too clearly and circumstantially for it to be purely imaginary. And there is the locket. How do you account for the existence of the locket? Besides we can easily ascertain if any gipsies have been seen in the neighbourhood lately.”

“True. I will cause inquiries to be made, and if I can lay my hands on that miserable old woman I will have her prosecuted as a vagrant, if not for obtaining money under false pretences.”

“Still, Mr. Basel, where did the locket come from? It seems to be of gold; it is very like the one my brother bought at Leamington; it bears exactly the same devices, and the hair, to all appearance, is his and Valérie’s worked into a true lover’s knot. I quite agree with you that the gipsy is a rank impostor; but how can you account for her acquaintance with so

many circumstances known only to our two families?"

"How can you be sure they are known only to our two families? Servants listen and servants talk. It has been said that no man is a hero to his valet, and I imagine that few of us have secrets from our servants. And then about the locket. You know it was one of the things sought for in the ruins. I heard your father myself describe it to the searchers. All the neighbourhood knows the history of that locket. And, as I understand, it was not a unique article—not made specially to order, I mean. There are, no doubt, hundreds in existence exactly like it. I dare say you might get duplicates of it in every jeweller's shop in Manchester and Redburn. This gipsy, or one of her tribe, has chanced to come across one—stolen it, I should rather say, for these people are not much given to buying. The hair and the true lover's knot would present no greater difficulty than the concoction of the story she told Valérie, and for which she got a sovereign, possibly two. I care nothing for the money, though I do most deeply

regret the probable effect of the occurrence on the poor girl's mind. She will be more confirmed in her illusion than ever."

"I think if she could be reasoned with she would see how impossible——"

"No doubt. But you see the misfortune is that she refuses to listen to reason. She does not pretend to listen. She listens only, as she says, to what her own heart tells her. Notwithstanding the doctor's orders, I tried a few days ago the effect of a little quiet remonstrance. But it was no use; she grew excited, and I had to stop. How could she, do you suppose, give one moment's heed to this preposterous gipsy's story if she were in her right mind? To begin with, how could your poor brother possibly have survived that terrible fire—by what miracle have escaped destruction? And, supposing him to have escaped, how was he spirited away? why does he remain away? why does he not return to his home, his family, and his betrothed? And, in the name of all that is absurd, why does he send a keepsake and a message to Valérie by an old gipsy woman? But we cannot, unfor-

tunately, say all this to her—or rather if we did it would have no effect. We must wait in patience until her reason is fully restored, as the doctor says in time it will be, and I think he is right.”

“Still she is sensible in everything else, Mr. Basel. When I am with her she seems as sane as I am myself; and I declare that for a minute or two this afternoon she almost made me believe there really was something in the gipsy’s story, preposterous as it is.”

“You are quite right, Mabel. Her mind generally is as sound as ever it was, and therein lies our hope of her ultimate recovery. She is suffering from temporary monomania, for which the best medicine is patience and gentleness. Only one word more, Mabel—for I see you want to go—and I am rather busy to-day. Let us keep this matter to ourselves. It will profit nothing to repeat it, and if the story gets abroad it will grow in absurdity every time it is told.”

“You would not have me mention it at home, then, nor even to Mrs. Basel?”

"That is what I mean, my dear Mabel—nor even to Fritz."

"Of course not," answered the young lady, with a slight toss of her head; "that goes without saying."

"*Donner Wetter!*" said Mr. Basel to himself, as he returned from handing his visitor to her carriage, "what a woman of business she would make. I should do best, I think, to make her my partner instead of Fritz, and let him stay at home to look after the house and the babies! Poor Fritz! he will have to play second fiddle; but there is one consolation—he will never know it, and it is well he should have a wife able to look after him and take care of his interests."

CHAPTER II.

THE LADY IN BLACK.

A MONTH later Mabel and Fritz were married by special licence at Brandwood Hall. The strictest privacy was observed, and immediately after the ceremony the bride and bridegroom, who were already equipped for the journey, left for London, where, and at Paris, they proposed to spend a short honeymoon.

The only persons present at the wedding, besides the members of the two families, were Mr. Hartwell and Mr. Allthings, by the latter of whom the knot was of course tied. Until almost the last moment it was uncertain whether Valérie would be present or not. A few days after Mabel had informed her of the approaching event she had written to say that, so long as

poor Frank was away (as she was sure, against his own will and unhappy), she did not think it would be meet for her to be present at a wedding, even that of her brother and her friend; but she would be present in spirit, and she wished them with all her heart every happiness.

The day before the wedding Mabel received a second letter, in which Valérie said she had been thinking that, if Frank could be consulted, he would probably wish her to be present at his sister's wedding, and keep his mother company after her daughter's departure; that she had therefore resolved to be present, and would come next day with her father and mother.

Notwithstanding this intimation of her intention, Valérie's appearance in the drawing-room of Brandwood Hall was somewhat of a surprise, for nobody felt sure that she might not at the last moment again change her mind and stay away; and certainly nobody expected that she would make, by her costume, a silent, yet effective, protest against the assumption

that her lover was dead. While everyone else appeared in black—the bride even being arrayed in half mourning—Valérie wore a gown of pearl-gray silk, trimmed with pale blue. A white rose, Frank's favourite flower, shone in her dark hair, and suspended from a heavy gold chain was the locket given to her by the gipsy—the "Forget me not" resting on her bosom, the "Hope" turned outwards—that all might see she did not despair of her lover's return. Her face, though pale, was composed, but her eyes at times looked unutterably sad. She was thinking of what might have been; that if Frank had not been spirited away—how or by whom she could not tell—there would have been that day two weddings, one of them her own. "Oh, Frank, dear, why don't you come back?" she murmured. "If you only knew how my heart is breaking!"

Rachel read Valérie's thoughts and her heart bled for her. She took the poor girl's hand lovingly in hers and remained by her side during the ceremony; and, as the result of a long colloquy they afterwards had together,

Valérie consented to make a stay of some duration at Brandwood Hall.

Before she returned home the girl's unwavering belief, which it was still beyond the power of argument to shake, made so deep an impression on Rachel that, despite her conviction of its wild absurdity, she began to entertain a vague hope that she might, after all, see her boy again in the flesh. The idea, baseless as she could only deem it, gave her some slight comfort, and by changing the current of her thoughts enabled her the better to sustain the burden of her sorrow.

Though there was no wedding-breakfast, the master of Brandwood entertained his guests at luncheon, which, to suit his convenience and that of Mr. Basel, was served shortly after the departure of the bride and bridegroom. He ordered up some of his oldest port wine, of a vintage highly appreciated by Mr. Allthings, and drank in a quiet way the health of the newly-married pair.

"Much happiness to 'em," he said, and a murmur that was supposed to be an echo of

his words ran round the table ; but there was nothing like speechmaking.

Altogether Adam seemed to be in fair spirits and more like himself, his guests thought, than he had been any time since his son's death. Though this might be due, in some degree, to the excitement of the occasion and to the effect of the old port, of which he drank rather freely, he did feel more like himself ; hope was springing anew in his breast, and he saw in the marriage of his daughter a step toward, at least, a part fulfilment of the scheme which had become the chief object of his existence. True, he could no longer hope to see his son member for Redburn ; but he might easily witness the birth of a grandson, the destined inheritor of his wealth and the bearer of his name ; and, whether he lived to see it or not, the lad would be one of the richest men in the county, and if he "shaped right," one of the most important.

Meanwhile Adam had much to do, and though he felt his son's death less than he had done, he sorely missed his help in the business.

The burning of the Old Factory, the fight with the insurance people—for after a fire generally comes a fight—and the rebuilding had thrown immense additional weight on his shoulders. But he bore the burden bravely, and made a point of showing those about him that he was fully equal to the task. He looked into everything of importance for himself, and was more exacting with his people than he had been in his son's lifetime. Not a day went by that more than one of them did not wish the young master was back again.

Luncheon over, the gentlemen adjourned to Adam's room, and after a smoke, to the accompaniment, of course, of brandy-and-water, he and Basel were driven in the latter's carriage to Moorwell. To a suggestion of Rachel's that he should take a holiday, he answered that he had pressing work to do which could not possibly be put off. He little suspected that work of a sort he had never had before, work which would tax his energies to the utmost, was awaiting him.

He found, as he expected, several people

waiting to see him—an architect, a master builder, a commercial traveller, and one or two others. After despatching his business with these, he turned to his desk and was soon immersed in plans and specifications, and proposals for filling the Old Factory—or rather the Old Factory's successor—with machinery. He had been thus occupied about half an hour, when there came a knock at the door, which he answered, as usual, by a curt "Come in." Whereupon a clerk entered and announced that a lady in the outer office desired to see him.

"Who is she?" asked his master.

"I don't know, sir. Never saw her before, so far as I know; and if I had it would not make much difference, for she is thickly veiled and dressed in black."

"Say I am very busy, and ask her name and business. But stay—I don't know as it matters. It'll come to the same thing in the end. Show her in."

The lady came in. As the clerk had said, she was veiled and wore mourning as deep as it was possible to make it.

"Sit down. What can I do for you?" said Adam, who, thinking from the look of his visitor that he had to deal with a beggar, did not feel disposed to waste time on superfluous courtesies.

"You don't remember me, I think, Mr. Blackthorne?"

"No, I cannot say as I do, though it seems to me somehow as I have heard your voice before."

"It must be my veil, I suppose," observed the lady, at the same time drawing that impediment aside.

Adam bounded from his chair. The woman before him, dressed in widow's weeds, was Lydia Fell.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed, "I thought you were dead."

"Who said so?"

"It was in a newspaper as somebody—we thought your brother—sent us from America. You had been drowned at some place—Albany, I think—by the overturning of a boat."

"That was a mistake. There was a boat

accident, and I was among the passengers, but not among the drowned."

"In any case," said Adam sternly, for he had now recovered his composure, "you have no business here. I paid you to go away and stop away. What do you want of me?"

"I want an account of the money my husband left."

"Your husband, woman! What have I to do with him? Who is he?"

"Your son Frank was my husband, Mr. Blackthorne, and the father of——"

"It's a lie," exclaimed Adam fiercely, not waiting for the completion of the sentence.

"And the father of my child," continued Lydia, with outward calm, albeit she was trembling with suppressed anger.

"That's another lie. Have you any more to tell? You'd better out with 'em while you are doing."

"They are no lies, Mr. Blackthorne, as you will find. Frank and I were married at Manchester Old Church (here she named a date), as you will see by this paper."

"D—— your papers. I want none of 'em. Will you just tell me, then, if you were married to Frank, why you took money from me to go away, and engaged to give no further trouble, and signed your name as Lydia Fell?"

"That was Stephen's doing. I was always against it, and wanted all along to tell you the truth; but he would not let me. He said if I did we should all be sent away without a shilling."

"So you expect me to believe that Frank helped you to deceive me? For if what you say be true, he must have been an accomplice."

"I am not answerable for Frank," rejoined Lydia, sullenly. "I only know that he begged of me and my brother, and better begged, not to tell you we were married."

"Anyhow you are answerable for yourself, and you admit that you were a party to the deceit. You either lied when you signed that paper and took my money, or you are lying now. I believe you are lying now. Now just look here, Lydia Fell—or whatever you may please to call yourself—I have been victimised once, but I

don't mean to be victimised again. While Frank lived it was worth my while to keep you at a distance—at any rate, until he was safely married—but now I have nothing either to fear or hope from you; and I won't bleed another pound—no, nor a single penny piece—not if it would save your life—and the sooner you get out of this office the better.”

“But, Mr. Blackthorne, just listen. I can prove——”

“Not another word, woman; not another word. And if you don't get out while I can control myself, by heaven I shall do you a mischief.”

As he spoke Adam half rose from his chair; and he looked so dangerous that Lydia beat a hasty retreat to the door.

“You will repent this violence, Mr. Blackthorne,” she exclaimed in an agitated voice, as she reached the threshold. “It is now war between us.”

“War let it be, then,” said Adam, sinking back into his seat.

“Curse the hussy!” he muttered as the

door closed behind Lydia, "is it possible there can be any truth in what she says? She seems very confident. But, no; Frank would never have deceived me in that way. Besides, why did they not proclaim the marriage before, if there was one? It must be a dodge; and I'll see Lydia and her clever brother hanged before I'll be done a second time."

Should he take any steps? he asked himself—see his lawyer or consult with Basel? But what steps could be taken? What facts had he to lay before Bruff, and what could the latter do in the matter? As yet there was clearly no necessity for taking legal advice, albeit the necessity might arise. True, he might consult Basel, but that was a course he felt very reluctant to adopt; for it would compel him to relate the history of Frank's entanglement with Lydia Fell, and his friend might possibly think he ought to have been told of it before the engagement. Still, Basel had a long head, and if the thing went any farther he would certainly take him into his confidence.

On the whole, concluded Adam, the best thing

he could do was to be quiet and keep his own counsel. If the Fells were in earnest, and Lydia could get anybody to believe her story, and take up her case, he would hear more of it quite soon enough. If not, the least said the better.

CHAPTER III.

TOMMY TWIRLER HEARS A BUZZ.

ADAM was right in his surmise that he might possibly hear something more of Lydia Fell and her story. A few days after that lady's visit to his office, our old friend, Tommy Twirler, sought an interview with his master, choosing, as usual, the dinner hour, as the time when they were most likely to be free from interruption.

"Oh! it's you, Tommy, is it?" said Adam, as his faithful servant walked into his room, as he generally did, without knocking. "Got something to tell me?"

"Ay, it's me," answered Tommy, taking a chair without waiting for an invitation. "I have gotten a bit o' buzz (rumour) to tell you. That's what I've come for. But yo've happen yerd"

"I don't think I have. At least I have heard nowt particular. What is it?"

"It's about that theer Lydia Fell. Hoo's come back, it seems."

"Yes, I'm aware of that."

"Are yo' aweer what hoo says?"

"No; what does she say?"

"Hoo says as yo're Frank and hoo wor wed, and as hoo has gotten a child as he's father to—a little lad."

"The deuce she does! And does anybody believe her?"

"Ay, dun they—lots o' folk. And they sayin as 'Torney Oke at Orrington has agreed to take her case up—no profit no pay."

"And what think you, Tommy? Do you think as there's owt in it?"

"Well, it looks vary quare, but I can hardly believe as yo're Frank would be such a foo' as to go and fasten hissself to th' likes of hor. Yet I mon (must) say as my mind misgav me when he went off a-hunting theer, and hoo went off at th' same time to see her aunt as wor ill—hoo wornt ill, not hoo."

"It isn't true, Tommy; it cannot be true. If they were wed why did she agree to go away and stop away, and sign her name to a paper I have there (pointing to his safe) as Lydia Fell? It was just like swearing as she was single."

"Hoo happen geet summut for going away?"

"She did, and a good deal too."

"Mutn't (might not) that account for it, thinken you, mayster? Some folks will do owt for brass."

Adam made a grimace. The same idea had occurred to him; but he was not the man to abandon a theory which he had deliberately formed, merely because it happened to conflict with a fact or two.

"Well, it might, Tommy," he rejoined, "but I don't think it does. Depend upon it, it's all a dodge, and that Stephen is at the bottom of it—you see if he isn't. He's as deep as a well. They've heard of Frank's death, and she has come over here to try and get some more brass out of me. They've made up this tale about him and Lydia being wed. They think that sooner than have a scandal I'll pay; but they'll

find out their mistake before they've done. And about this pretended child—don't you think if there had been anything of that sort we should have heard of it before now?"

"Well, it does look quare; there's no denying that. I seed no signs of owt o' th' soort afoor Lydia went; and I watched—and so did our Betty too."

"Nor anybody else. It's all a lie, like the rest. Just a lie from beginning to end."

"It may be so," answered Tommy, "and I hope so, but——" and he shook his head.

"But what, Tommy? Out with it."

"I wor nobbut (only) thinking as if there wor nowt in it 'Torney Oke would not be having owt to do wi' it. He's gotten his heyd reyt screwed on, he has, and he's gradely sharp too."

"A low fellow!" exclaimed Adam angrily; "the most unscrupulous practitioner in the neighbourhood. He'll take up any dirty case if he can make six-and-eightpence by it."

"I durned know nowt about unscrupulus, but he is th' craftiest lawyer i' these 'ere parts,

and makes a bonny lot o' brass they sayin'—and that's th' main point, I reckon. It's what we're all after, brass is."

"It is what Lydia Fell is after, anyway. Now look here, Tommy. I expect this thing will make some stir—be a good deal talked about, you know—and when anybody says anything about it in your hearing, you must just say as there isn't a word of truth in it, and as I've got a paper under Lydia Fell's own hand—written just before she went to America—declaring that she was never wed to Frank, and has no claim on him."

This was rather a highly-coloured description of Lydia's receipt for the two thousand pounds, but Adam did not stick at trifles when his blood was up.

"I'll tell 'em reyt enough, you may be sure of that," said Tommy. "I never did like them theer Fells, fro' th' fost (first), as I tow'd yo'; and I do hope as it will not torn out as Frank made a foo' of hissel wi' that Lydia. But hoo's a gradely bad lot, hoo is, yo' can see it in her een (eyes)."

After which sage reflection Tommy rose from his chair and moved towards the door.

"You'll come in now and then, Tommy, and let me know what folks say?" said his master.

"Ay, when there's owt fresh," replied Tommy, who, as he had only half an hour left in which to get his dinner, and see to the punctual pulling of the factory bell, evidently desired to bring the conversation to a close.

"Now, at any rate, I must see Basel," thought Adam, when he was left alone. "If I don't tell him somebody else will."

A few minutes afterwards he was on his way to the dyeworks, which were about a mile distant from the factory. They were a non-descript collection of buildings of all shapes and sizes, scattered about as if they had been dropped haphazard from the sky, or sprung at random from the ground. For the place had grown from small beginnings, bit by bit, and almost year by year, to be a concern of great magnitude. Symmetry in these circumstances was out of the question, and Basel had been constrained to put up new workshops as he

wanted them, and where he wanted them. From an æsthetic point of view Moorwell dyeworks were about as unattractive as it is possible to imagine. Some of the buildings were of brick—old, ugly, slabsided, and weatherworn; others were of sandstone—new, vast, and with some slight pretensions to shapeliness. From some of them issued clouds of steam, which shrouded the place in perpetual gloom. Two hideous chimneys vomited forth pillars of dense smoke. The roads were black, and Moorwell brook, where it flowed through the works, was foul with unspeakable abominations. The stench beggared description, especially when, as sometimes befell, a cask of blood (which unsavoury material before the introduction of the alizarine process was largely used in turkey-red dyeing) got started in the course of conveyance from the canal wharf. Then people for miles round got a whiff that almost choked them. But no serious harm was ever known to come of these evil odours, a piece of good fortune that was generally ascribed to the existence in the neighbourhood of several chemical works, whose pungent, if

not fragrant, fumes acted as a sort of antidote to the scent of "Basel's blood barrels," as they were commonly called. But none of these things troubled Adam Blackthorne, as he wended his way towards his partner's office. For even if he had not been used to them he was just then in too serious a mood to be critical or censorious. After threading his way among a number of carts, some laden with coals, some with calico pieces—red, white, and gray, some with madder and other dyestuffs, some with carboys of chemicals, and passing several groups of dyers, with bare arms and enormous ironbound clogs, their legs swathed in blanketing, bending under heavy burdens of damp cloth, he reached Basel's office. It was, however, rather a laboratory than a place for bookkeeping and correspondence. One side of it was entirely taken up by a long bench, terminating in a large slopstone. On the bench were ranged numerous stoppered bottles, test tubes, an electric machine, blowpipes, chemical weigh scales under glass shades, and other scientific instruments. On the opposite side was a large bookcase; near it a small

writing-table; and by the fireside, in a wooden uncushioned armchair, sat the master of the establishment, smoking a huge porcelain pipe, and deep in the perusal of a new work on chemistry.

"Welcome, friend Blackthorne," he exclaimed, as his visitor entered. "I am glad to see you. It is not often, these days, that you come to see how we are going on."

"No, I have not time for that now, and I do not suppose you would have seen me to-day if my business had not been pressing. I am threatened with a new trouble, Basel."

"Indeed, my friend, I am sorry to hear that—nothing serious, I hope. Whatever it is, you may always count on me, as you well know."

And then Adam told him the story the reader already knows, of Frank's entanglement with Lydia Fell, of the money given her to compound her claim and to go away, of her return, and of her pretension to be his son's widow. He excused himself for not having mentioned the circumstance to his partner before, on the ground that when the Fells left

England he looked upon the matter as settled, that it did not appear to him any useful purpose would be served by talking about it; and the less it was talked about, he thought, the better.

"I do not blame you for not having told me of poor Frank's intrigue with this Lydia Fell," said Basel, when Adam had concluded his story; "it was your affair and his, not mine, and you had a perfect right to keep it to yourselves. It is always best to wash one's dirty linen at home. And if it had been only an ordinary intrigue, an affair of calf love, it would not have mattered much. But this marriage, friend Blackthorne—I fear this marriage is a bad business."

"You surely don't think that Frank could be such a fool—that it is possible——"

"Alas, friend Blackthorne," interrupted Basel, shaking his head, "human folly, especially the folly of a young man, is almost as boundless as the possible itself. I know nothing of the marriage—whether there has been a marriage or not, nor whether, if there has been, it was legal. Yet it hardly seems in the nature of things that this woman should

come all the way from America, and that Lawyer Hawke, who, rogue as he is, knows what he is about, should take the case up, unless they have some grounds to go upon. And do you think you acted quite wisely when Miss Fell came to your office the other day?"

"I did all I could," answered Adam grimly. "I could not very well kick her downstairs, or throw her into the cold-water lodge, but if it had been her brother I would have done both."

"And you would have done a very foolish thing, friend Blackthorne. There are times when violence answers, perhaps, though I doubt it, but it is worse than useless in a case of this sort. Here we want coolness, tact, skilful management, *finesse*. My meaning was something quite different. I meant that you would have done more wisely to have heard her story quietly to the end, examined her proofs, and, perhaps, have made it worth her while to go back quietly to America."

"What! pay her a second time? Never while her heart beats. Why, she would be here again next year, with another lying story."

"Softly, friend Blackthorne, softly. I said examine her proofs. If her proofs are wanting I would not advise you to give her a farthing. But if the evidence she can offer is of a nature likely to satisfy a reasonable man, would it not be better to pay her the sum she can claim as Frank's widow, and let her go quietly about her business, than have all the trouble, turmoil, and scandal of a trial? How much can a widow claim in this country?"

"A third of the personalty."

"And had Frank any personalty?"

"Yes, six thousand pounds. I administered."

"Then all she can claim is two thousand pounds. Better pay it twice over, friend Blackthorne, than have the worry of a lawsuit."

"As far as that goes I am quite of your opinion. But if I gave two thousand pounds to everyone as threatened me with law I should soon have nothing left. And as for Lydia Fell, I don't believe a word she says. I don't believe there has been any marriage; and unless I make a stand now this will not be the last dodge she and her brother will try. I begin to think now

as I did wrong in paying them to go to America. I should just have sent them about their business, and told them to do their worst. I think I must put my foot down this time, Basel. Anyhow, before we talk about compromise, the fact of the marriage must be conclusively proved. Frank was weak and foolish, I know; but he cannot have been so soft as to fasten himself to Lydia Fell."

"I hope you are right, friend Blackthorne, but I very much fear that you are wrong, and that Frank did commit this folly. There is nothing to be gained by shutting our eyes to facts. Don't you see that the theory of such a marriage explains much of his conduct? Don't you remember how, when he was evidently in love with poor Valérie, he held back from declaring himself; how we all remarked his hesitation, and were at a loss to understand it? Now we have the explanation; for if he was married to Miss Fell his hesitation was natural, and, as I understand, he spoke to Valérie the very day, or the day after, he heard of Miss Fell's supposed death."

Adam nodded assent. It was really, as he well remembered, the day before; but, as he mentally remarked, there was no use making things to the worst.

"I think I can understand too," continued Basel, "how Frank was inveigled into a marriage. You see he was thrown into the company of the Fells nearly every day. He often stayed at Moorwell all night. He was young and impressionable, and it would not be difficult for a clever, good-looking, unscrupulous woman like Lydia to captivate him. Her superior age, instead of being a drawback, was an advantage—it was a preservative against her falling in love herself, and perhaps worse. She had her brother to help her. He, doubtless, left them often alone together, and one day Frank, artfully angled by the lady, offered marriage. From that moment his fate was sealed. The Fells, knowing that an open marriage would certainly be opposed, and probably prevented, suggested a secret one, with the intention, doubtless, of subsequently avowing it and turning it to Stephen's advantage. When, however, they found that they would not be able

to propitiate you, that if the marriage were made known you would probably cast Frank off, they grasped eagerly at the chance of receiving a handsome sum of money to compromise a claim which Lydia had forfeited by making Frank marry her. As for Frank, he remained silent out of fear of you and the consequences to himself. When he saw that Lydia was willing to abandon him for a sufficient consideration, he was cured of his illusion, and ceased to care for her; and he may have thought that if she went to America he would be rid of her for ever. At any rate, that is my reading of the riddle, always assuming, of course, that there actually has been a marriage."

Basel, on the principle, probably, of not speaking ill of the dead, did not suggest that Frank had been to blame for winning Valérie's love while he was, or thought he was, the husband of another woman.

Adam, if not convinced, was at least silenced by his partner's arguments. Struggle against the conviction as he might, he could no longer deny the possibility of a marriage.

"This is only my opinion, you know," resumed Basel, "and I would not advise you to act on it, or even accept it as in any way conclusive, without taking further advice. Why not see Bruff? He would advise you as to the legal bearings of the business."

"It is what I thought of doing. Will you go with me? Two heads are better than one sometimes."

"Certainly. When do you propose to go?"

"To-morrow. I will call for you at the Châlet—or here—and we will drive over together. Would nine o'clock suit you?"

"Exactly. And, if it makes no difference, I would rather start from here."

"Very well, we will start from here then. Another thing: will you say anything at home—will you tell Mrs. Basel?—and Valérie?"

"Poor Valérie," said the other with a sigh. "If she knew it might kill her outright. But no, she would not believe it. Nevertheless, we must keep it from her. I shall tell my wife just enough, and no more, to put her on her guard, and make sure that nothing of this is told to

Valérie, for we shall have all sorts of rumours flying about."

"I shall say nothing to Rachel for the moment," observed Adam, as he rose to take leave. "It will be a sore trouble to her anyway; and we may as well keep it from her as long as possible."

"Perhaps you are right. Spare her as much as you can. She deserves all the consideration it is possible to give her. I think sometimes that the two best women in the world are your wife and my daughter. But you want to be going. I will walk with you up the road. I want to speak to you about one or two matters of business. I see our stock of seventy-two reeds is running very low. When can you let us have a delivery?"

The two walked and talked together until they were within sight of the factory gates, when Basel, perceiving that a man was waiting to speak to Adam, bade him adieu, and returned to his own place.

The man in question was smartly dressed, wore a shiny hat set very much on one side,

and carried himself in a jaunty, and, as Adam thought, an impudent fashion.

"Mr. Blackthorne, I believe?" said the stranger.

"I believe so."

"Adam?" queried the stranger further.

"Yes."

"Then I have a couple of documents for you, Mr. Blackthorne, from Mr. Hawke, of Orrington," remarked the man, handing him at the same time two thick, oblong pieces of paper.

"What are they?"

"One is notice of an action that has been commenced against you in the Palatinate Court of Chancery, by Mrs. Lydia Blackthorne, to set aside the letters of administration granted to you as Francis Adam Blackthorne's next of kin, and to substitute her for you as administrator of his estate. The other is an order from the Palatinate Court—a bill of discovery it is generally called—for the production of all documents bearing thereupon—such as contracts of copartnership, deeds of settlement, and so forth—all of which will, doubtless, be fully explained to you by your solicitor."

"Thank you," answered Adam, pocketing the papers ; for, despite the man's jaunty manner, he spoke civilly enough. "I will see my solicitor to-morrow and give him these things."

"Tommy Twirler was right," he muttered, as he walked slowly up the factory yard. "Hawke has taken the case up, and this is the first shot—a double one—it seems. Well, we'll see what Bruff says about it."

"And that's old Blackthorne," mentally observed the lawyer's clerk. "He looks like fighting a stiffish battle, and as he has any amount of tin, and we are cocksure to win, why we'll make him pay, that's all. Charley Hawke is the boy to run up costs—is not he just? And now I'll go and wet my whistle somewhere ; it is all in the day's work."

CHAPTER IV.

A QUARREL.

MR. BRUFF, Adam's lawyer, was not the same shrewd old gentleman that helped Nanny Cooper to invest her savings and him to buy the Old Factory, but his son Leonard, who had succeeded to his practice and inherited half his fortune, which amounted, one way and another, people said, to nigh a hundred thousand pounds. But though the young man—if a man of thirty may still be called young—was thus rendered independent of his profession, he had an hereditary liking for the law; and having, moreover, a great respect for the office, which was established by his grandfather in the middle of the last century, and a still greater respect for the handsome income it produced, he wrought almost as assi-

duously at his calling as either of his predecessors had done. He was, however, considered to be less clever than his father; and, though his clients had the most implicit confidence in his integrity, they had sometimes reason to regret that he was not a little quicker of apprehension and a little more fertile in resource. His practice lay principally among people having money to invest, property to purchase, conveyances to make, and wills to draw. He had several fat agencies withal, cared little for contentious cases, and would not take up a police affair at any price. He said he could afford to pick his business, and if anything requiring sharp practice were proposed to him he would quietly refer the offerer to one of his less scrupulous brethren.

This was the man upon whom Adam Blackthorne and Basel waited the day after their interview at the latter's works.

"I am glad you have come," said the lawyer, as he shook hands with his client. "You have saved me the trouble of running over to Moorwell. I got a document yesterday that requires both explanation and attention—an order from

the Chancery Court of the County Palatine, requiring me to produce any papers I may have in my possession relating to an action which has been commenced against you at the suit of Lydia Blackthorne. Who is Lydia Blackthorne, and what does it all mean?"

"I have got a similar document, and another also. Here they are."

"Ah, I see; they come from the office of Mr. Hawke. Just like him, to do a dirty trick like this. He knows I am your legal adviser, and would have accepted service on your behalf, and yet he must needs put you to the annoyance of being served personally. But what does it all mean? Who is Lydia Blackthorne, and on what ground does she claim to have these letters of administration set aside?"

Then Adam told the lawyer the story of Lydia Fell, of her past relations with his son, and of her present claim.

"It's very strange," remarked Bruff reflectively, taking off and wiping his spectacles (he was a spare, dim-eyed man, with sallow features and thin lips), "I never heard of such

a thing in all my life before—never. And they say there is a child, do they?”

“Yes, a boy.”

“Then why doesn’t she get him made a ward in Chancery?”

“That I cannot tell. But what do you think—do you think there was a marriage?”

“That of course I cannot say until I have had an opportunity of inspecting the marriage certificate. But I am afraid there was, Mr. Blackthorne. It looks very like it.”

“I differ from you, Bruff. I don’t think it is likely. I think it is very unlikely.”

“As I have said, I cannot give a final opinion until I have seen the evidence. But I should say, knowing what I do of Charley Hawke, that he would not have taken the case up—if, as you have heard, he is taking it up on speculation—unless he had first satisfied himself as to the fact and the validity of the alleged marriage.”

“D—— Charley Hawke!” exclaimed Adam. “You all throw that fellow in my teeth. Has he all the sense, and sharpness, and skill in the

world, and are we to throw up the sponge at the mere sound of his name? Is there nobody as knows law but him?"

"You asked my opinion, Mr. Blackthorne," rejoined the lawyer coldly, whom this outburst had deeply offended, "and I can only give it you honestly, based on such data as I have."

"It seems to me," interposed Basel, "as I said to my friend yesterday, that the best thing he can do, even if there be some doubt about the marriage, is just to pay the two thousand pounds, which is all the woman can claim, and have done with the business. Frank is dead. It can make no difference to him whether this woman calls herself his widow or not, and the two thousand pounds she is after, if she takes it as a settlement in full of all demands—which, of course, must be a condition *sine quâ non*—will be well spent if it only serves to prevent scandal, and the worry and excitement of a law-suit."

"But I fear two thousand will not satisfy her," said Bruff. "And then there's the child."

"I don't much believe in the child," answered Basel. "Anyhow if there is one let her provide

for him out of the two thousand I propose to be given her, and the two thousand she has already got. Why don't you think she will be satisfied with the two thousand? It is all she can demand."

"Because Mr. Blackthorne, by a deed we have in the office here, has charged the Brandwood estate with an annuity of fifteen hundred a year in favour of his son's widow, and settled the estate itself on his son and his heirs male in tail. And I don't think it is likely that this Miss Lydia Fell, or whatever may be her right name, is the sort of woman to give up fifteen hundred a year for a lump sum of two thousand."

"Man, what do you mean?" exclaimed Adam so roughly and vehemently that he offended Mr. Bruff a second time.

"I mean exactly what I say, Mr. Blackthorne. You surely cannot have forgotten the arrangement of December last, when, in anticipation of your son's approaching marriage, you had a new deed of copartnership drawn, and the Brandwood estate settled on him for his life (after your death), and in remainder on his eldest son?"

"That was in anticipation of his marriage with Miss Valérie Basel, and not with a hussy like this Lydia Fell."

"But the deed is general, and applies to any marriage; not specifically to his marriage with Miss Valérie."

"Well, then, I'll revoke it. What I did I can undo."

"It's very unfortunate, Mr. Blackthorne; but I am afraid that it is not within your power."

"Why not?"

"Because the settlement is in the nature of a contract. You will remember that the original deed of copartnership with your son gave him a third of the profits; but when you proposed to settle on him the Brandwood estate, and assure his widow an annuity of fifteen hundred a year, you thought it was only fair to reduce the proportion of profit falling to his share to one-fifth. We discussed the matter in the office here at the time—I and my managing clerk—and we came to the conclusion that it was expedient to record this fact in the settlement. The deed therefore recites that, in consideration of Frank

Blackthorne surrendering a portion of his interest in the business at Moorwell, you settle upon him your estate at Brandwood. It is consequently a contract, and can only be rescinded by the consent of both the parties thereto."

"Whatever possessed you to make such a fool of a settlement as that, Bruff?"

"Really, Mr. Blackthorne, if you cannot use more courteous language I shall be obliged to terminate the interview. How could I know your son had contracted a secret marriage, of which there was issue, or might be issue? If I acted in ignorance so did you. I read the deed over to you, explained its effect, and answered all your questions concerning it. What could I do more? In what respect am I to blame?"

"Where is this deed?"

"In my strong room, in your deed chest."

"Would you be good enough to send for it or fetch it?"

"Certainly; and I will read it over to you."

"I am not going to hear it read over. I know more about it than I want already. I'm just going to stick it in the fire."

"Then I cannot let you have it, Mr. Blackthorne," replied the lawyer with great deliberation, yet with great firmness.

"What for?" demanded Adam, his face flushing red, and his hands trembling with suppressed passion. "Is it not mine—have I not paid you for it—cannot I do what I like with my own?"

"Not in this case, Mr. Blackthorne. I have received notice of a bill of discovery having been filed in the Palatinate Court, calling on me to produce all papers connected with the case in my possession. If I were to surrender this deed, now that you have expressed your intention of destroying it, I should be guilty of contempt of court."

"What then?"

"What then! Why I should be liable to imprisonment, besides injuring my professional reputation. No, Mr. Blackthorne, you must not ask me to connive at the destruction of this, or any other instrument, that I may be required to produce."

"But nobody would be the wiser. Hawke

does not know of the existence of this deed, or he would have said something about it."

"That does not follow, Mr. Blackthorne. Things ooze out, you know. This deed has never been looked upon as a secret. Your son, or yourself, or one of my clerks, may have casually mentioned it to somebody. It is hardly possible that all knowledge of it should be confined to us three. Hawke is sure to ferret it out sooner or later, and a nice mess we should be in if it were found that we had destroyed such a document. Besides, I may be put on my oath, and you would surely not have me perjure myself. No, Mr. Blackthorne, I am sorry to disoblige you, but I cannot, after what you have said, let this deed go out of my hands."

"But you would not need to know anything about my destroying it. In fact, I have changed my mind. I want to take it home and look it over. That deed is my property; what I do with it is my business, and nobody's else."

"I cannot do it, Mr. Blackthorne; the order from the court is peremptory. I am responsible for the safe keeping of this and all other docu-

ments in my custody that I may be called upon to produce ; and I must refuse to give them up. Copies you may have, but the originals I shall certainly keep."

"If that be your resolution, Mr. Bruff, you have lost me for a client. I mean to fight this case to the end. I will carry it to the Court of Queen's Bench ; I will carry it to the Chancery Court in London ; I will carry it to the House of Lords. I'll do owt—owt—rather than let Lydia Fell and her bastard have Brandwood. Have not I willed it to Mabel's children ? And I'll try to find a lawyer, Mr. Bruff, as has more brains and fewer scruples than you have."

"Be it so, Mr. Blackthorne," returned Bruff, who was now in as great a rage as Adam himself. "I would rather lose every client I have than connive at the absurd and dangerous act which you desire to commit. I hope you will find a lawyer as unscrupulous as yourself, that's all—somebody who will be a match for Charley Hawke. I don't profess to compete with such men. I never did. Yes, you had better find another lawyer ; I am too honest for you. But you will

lose your case all the same—that I am sure of. Your papers are, of course, always at your disposal, except those connected with the Chancery proceedings instituted by your daughter-in-law ; and of them you may have copies. Good-morning, gentlemen ; I have the honour to bid you good-morning.”

“My daughter-in-law !” muttered Adam, as he stepped into the street. “D—— the fellow !”

CHAPTER V.

LAWYER KEAN.

"I AM sorry, friend Blackthorne," observed Basel, as he and Adam waited in the bar parlour of The Bull's Head while their carriage was being got ready. "I am sorry you quarrelled with Bruff. He was a friend, and now I much fear you have made an enemy of him."

"But don't you see, Basel, that he is not the man for a job like this? Why, he decided the case offhand, without a fair consideration of the facts. He yields at the first summons. What is the good of a lawyer like that?"

"There I am disposed to agree with you. While it was thought to be a matter of two thousand pounds I counselled compromise. Now I counsel resistance until, at any rate, it is quite clear we have not even the ghost of a chance ;

and we are certainly not at that point yet. You must have a lawyer with more fight and resource in him than Mr. Bruff. Nevertheless, I am sorry you quarrelled with him."

"Well, perhaps I was a little hasty. But I could not help it. He aggravated me past bearing. And you may say what you like, Basel, he managed desperate badly about that deed. I never told him to make it irrevocable, and I swear I never knew before to-day as it was irrevocable. But there is no use talking about that now. The question is, what to do next? We must see another lawyer, and that soon. Do you know of any as you can recommend?"

"I think so. I made the acquaintance, a few months ago, of a Mr. Kean—the firm is Cutbill and Kean; though Cutbill has retired, I am told. He is just the man for you."

"At Manchester?"

"Yes, it is a Manchester firm. He was solicitor for Fairfield's failure. I was one of the trustees, you remember. That is how I came to know him. I liked his ways, and I have given him several little jobs since. Yes, Kean is the man for you, and being young and

aspiring, and eager for business, he will do his best, especially as you will be a new client."

"I'll go and see him to-morrow."

"I think you had better. I shall not be able to go with you, though; but you will do very well yourself. I will write a note from here and say you are going to call upon him on important business. What time shall we fix?"

"Let me see. I won't go by coach. I shall drive right through—say half-past one."

Basel called for paper and pen and began to write.

"Stay," interrupted Adam. "How would it be to ask him to have the register of the Old Church searched, to see if any marriage between Frank and Lydia Fell was celebrated there? Tell him to begin twelve months since, and search backwards—it will not be much of a job."

"A very excellent idea, friend Blackthorne. I need not go into any particulars, you can do that to-morrow—merely tell him to make the search."

A letter to this effect was written and posted before the partners left Redburn; and the next day at the time named Adam presented himself at the office of Messrs. Cutbill and Kean. It

was at the top of a gloomy flight of stairs, in a dark entry in King Street ; and Adam had almost as much difficulty in finding the entry as in mounting the stairs, which, like the law wherein he was about to plunge, had traps for the unwary in the shape of unsuspected holes and untrustworthy steps. Cutbill and Kean's outer office, which would have been none the worse for a good scrubbing and sweeping, was occupied by a small boy and a stout clerk. The boy, who sat on a high stool, was bending so low over a sheet of foolscap that he seemed to be writing with the tip of his nose. The clerk was warming himself before the fire and picking his teeth with a quill pen.

"Is Mr. Kean in?" asked Adam of the stout clerk.

"He is. Are you Mr. Blackthorne? You have an appointment, I think?"

"I am Mr. Blackthorne, and my friend, Mr. Basel, sent word yesterday that I would be here about this time, I believe."

"Will you please sit down a moment, and I'll see if he's at liberty?"

The clerk disappeared up a dark lobby, out of which, in a few seconds, he again emerged.

"Mr. Kean is engaged just now," he said, "but he will see you in one minute. Will you please sit down," for Adam still remained standing.

He was an impatient man, and if there was one thing more than another that he disliked it was waiting. A minute, however, was not long, so he accepted the clerk's invitation and took a seat. But when he had waited, not one minute only, but five, ten—nearly fifteen indeed—and nothing came of it, he began to feel slightly exasperated. They never treated him in that way at Bruff's office.

"Look here, young man," he said at length, rising from his chair, "you told me Mr. Kean would see me in one minute, and here I have been waiting twenty, and for aught I know I may go on waiting twenty more."

"No, not twenty, Mr. Blackthorne; not quite fifteen."

"It seems more like half an hour. It is a vast sight more than one minute, and that is what you said. Did you tell him that I was here waiting?"

"We never speak to Mr. Kean when he is engaged with a client. I wrote on a piece of

paper that a gentleman was waiting to see him by appointment, and he said, 'In one minute.'"

"That's what he always says, I expect, is it not?"

"Well, he says it very often," said the clerk with a grin. "If he said quarter of an hour or half an hour, clients might not wait sometimes, you know."

"They might go somewhere else," suggested Adam.

"Exactly; and that is what we don't want," rejoined the clerk frankly.

"Well, if you don't want me to go somewhere else, just put on one of your pieces of paper that Mr. Blackthorne, of Moorwell, has been waiting half an hour to see Mr. Kean, and as he does not feel like waiting any longer—and anything else you like."

This message, which was forthwith written out and sent into Mr. Kean, acted as an open sesame, and Adam, not in the sweetest of tempers, was ushered into the lawyer's private office. It was a large, gloomy, dusty room, and matched well with the blind alley, the staircase,

and the outer office. One side of it was filled with shelves crowded with ponderous law books. A large table and the floor were littered with papers and parchments black with dust; and the single window, grim with dirt, looked into a little court filled with old barrels, bottles, and packing cases, the property of a spirit merchant who occupied the ground floor. The only bright thing in this limbo of the law was its occupant, Solicitor Kean, a dapper little man with a full, almost round, vivacious face, sharp white teeth, dark expressive eyes and a forehead both broad and high.

"Ah, Mr. Blackthorne," he exclaimed, as Adam entered, "I am so sorry to have kept you waiting. But the fact is I had a client whose appointment preceded yours, and I could not get rid of him a minute sooner."

His manner was so pleasant, and he seemed so genuinely sorry to have made Adam wait, that the latter's anger was completely appeased, and he proceeded in his usual straightforward way to explain his business.

Kean listened attentively, asked a few questions, and, in a marvellously short time, as

Adam thought, he knew the ins and outs of the case as well as his client.

"I think I understand," he said ; "you want us to resist Miss Lydia and her claim to the last extremity ?"

"Yes. Would not you advise me to do so ?"

"Certainly. Always fight when you have nothing to gain by compromising ; and you may be sure we will do our best for you. I am bound to say, however, that at the first blush—so far as appears to me at the moment—the case will be a very difficult one."

"You think the chances are against us, then ?"

"At present they are—rather. But do not be discouraged. I have not seen all the papers yet, remember, nor had time fully to consider the matter. But I have won many a more unpromising suit. Something may happen. I may find a fatal flaw in Mr. Hawke's case. In any event we will put a bold face on and make a hard struggle for victory. Meanwhile I have got that marriage certificate. Here it is."

The document which the lawyer handed to Adam was to the following effect :

184.-Marriage solemnised at the Collegiate and Parish Church, in the Parish of Manchester, in the County of Lancaster.

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Con- dition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
20	February 13	Frank Blackthorne Lydia Fell	Full Full	Bachelor Spinster	Cotton Spinner Cotton Spinner	Warrington Lower Broughton	Adam Blackthorne Timothy Fell	Cotton Spinner Farmer

Married in the above Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, after license, by me,
EDWARD HARVEY, M.A., Chaplain.

This marriage { FRANK BLACKTHORNE } in the { MARK BRYTON.
was } presence
solemnised } of us { STEPHEN FELL.
between us { LYDIA FELL

I do hereby certify that the above extract is a true copy, taken from the original entry, made in the Marriage Register Book of the Collegiate and Parish Church of Manchester. As witness my hand this 20th day of May, 184-.

JOHN M. JONES, Officiating Minister.

Adam read and re-read this certificate, or rather extract, at least a dozen times, dwelling on every word and date, before he returned it to Mr. Kean. When he did so, his face was blanched and his hands trembled.

"There was a marriage, then?" he said, in a husky voice.

"Undoubtedly, for there is no question as to the genuineness of the extract. I sent my own clerk for it, and, as you see, sir, it is vouched for by the chaplain. No loophole here, I fear."

"But it says what is not true. Frank never lived at Warrington in his life, and she never lived at Lower Broughton—any way she was not living at Lower Broughton then—and I am not sure as he was of age on the 13th of February. I think he did not come of age till the 1st of March."

"That is not material, Mr. Blackthorne. If your son has made a false statement he may be liable to prosecution, but the marriage remains good. As to his living at Warrington, it is sufficient if he were staying there at the time of the marriage. Was he?"

"He might be. I know he went off into Cheshire hunting about that time; and Lydia went to see her aunt, as she said was ill."

"That explains it. They evidently went away for the purpose of getting married, and, as you are aware, the law allows considerable latitude in the matter of residence; indeed, I fancy the requirement is one generally honoured rather in the breach than the observance. But, as I just said, something may turn up. Don't lose your courage, and the next time you are in Manchester give me a call. Meanwhile, I will ask Mr. Bruff to send me all your papers, or copies of them. You know I have seen nothing yet. Perhaps, if we cannot upset the marriage, we can prevent Miss Lydia from coming into her fifteen hundred a year, and her son, if there be a son, from inheriting your entailed estate."

"Oh, there is one more matter I must mention. I have a paper, signed by this Lydia, agreeing for a payment of two thousand pounds, to release Frank from any claim she might have upon him and go to America. I have mentioned

it already, I think ; but, in the hurry of starting, I forgot to put the document in my pocket. Shall I send it you ?”

“By all means. It may not be worth much, but send it all the same. Let me have every document bearing on the case, however insignificant it may seem. So far as I can see at present, the best game we can play is a waiting one. Time may help, and cannot well injure us. I can, and, if necessary, will, protract the proceedings almost *ad infinitum*. Meanwhile, I shall make a rigid inquiry into the antecedents of Miss Lydia Fell. Gad, who knows ? she may have committed bigamy—such things have happened. If anything further occurs you will, of course, let me know ; and when I want to see you I will apprise you by post.”

“That’s right, Mr. Kean ; spare no expense in making inquiries. I should not at all wonder if that woman had committed bigamy—or murder either, for that matter—she would do either as soon as look, if it suited her purpose. And see here, I know law is an expensive game,

and you will have to spend a lot of money. Take this hundred-pound note to be going on with; and when you want more you have only to speak."

"Thank you, Mr. Blackthorne," replied Kean, as he accompanied his client to the outer door; "you are very kind; rest assured we shall do our best for you. I will tell our cash-keeper to send you a receipt by post. You need not take the trouble to wait. Waiting is evidently not your forte, Mr. Blackthorne—ah, ah! Good-day—ah, ah!" After the utterance of which little joke, the man of law retreated briskly into his dusty den, while Adam carefully felt his way down the rickety staircase.

CHAPTER VI.

DISCOURAGEMENT.

NEVER since the death of his son and the destruction of the Old Factory had the master of Moorwell felt so desolate, disappointed, and discouraged as when he emerged from the gloomy portal of Cutbill and Kean's office into the light of King Street—such light as there was; for the air was thick with smoke and dark clouds hung low in the sky.

Leaving for another day several business calls which he had intended to make, he went straight to the inn where he had left his horse and gig. On his way thither he was warmly greeted by several old acquaintances, and respectfully saluted by sundry persons whom he hardly knew even by sight; for Adam was now a

wealthy man, and candidates for the notice of the wealthy are never lacking. His appearance, moreover, was sufficient to attract some observation. Despite his nearly sixty winters and his white hair, his back was as straight, his step as firm, as when, thirty years before, he had thrashed Bill Nudger and wooed Rachel Orme; and although time had left its imprint on his features, his face was as ruddy as of yore, and showed no sign either of failing health or waning powers. He held his head high, smiled when people saluted him, and spoke cheerfully to the few with whom he stopped to exchange greetings. Yet his heart was heavy within him, and it was with a sense of relief that he found himself alone in his room at The White Bear. Ordering a glass of whisky he sat down before the fire, lighted a pipe, and fell into a deep reverie.

“And this is all that it has come to,” he thought; “this is the end of my strivings, my schemes, my almost life-long work. My only son dead—dead that a poor little factory girl might live—the fine estate, and all the money I have spent upon it, the very house

I live in, destined, in all probability, to become the property of Lydia Fell's child, and myself, maybe, compelled to pay her while I live, fifteen hundred a year! Rachel a bereaved mother, Valérie a broken-hearted girl with a clouded mind, and I a rich man whom everybody envies, whose best-laid plans have failed, and at present tenant for life of his own house and lands, without power either to sell or bequeath them."

For Adam could no longer resist the conviction that Frank and Lydia had actually been married, and that the knot was properly tied. He was a stubborn man, hard to persuade, and slow to change his beliefs; but facts are stubborn things, and the marriage certificate, backed by Kean's opinion, not even he could gainsay. He did not derive much encouragement from the crumb of comfort held out to him by the lawyer—the possibility of finding a flaw in the marriage or an informality in the settlement—whereby the claims of Lydia and her son might be barred. The possibility was almost wildly remote, and it was plain to see that Kean had only suggested it by way of putting the best face on the matter

and keeping up his client's spirits. It was something like a doctor's sentence on a moribund patient, that while there is life there is hope; and if the lawyer did succeed in hunting out a flaw, no one, probably, would be more surprised than himself. Yet, notwithstanding these misgivings, Adam never for a moment faltered in his resolve to fight the case to the end. His hatred of Lydia Fell as the cause of all his troubles (he almost persuaded himself that, but for her, his son would not have died) was boundless, and he vowed that if she did win, her victory should cost her dear. Had Frank been alive, he would doubtless have been angry with him too, almost angry enough to have disowned him. But it is even more difficult to be angry with a non-existent individual than with the wind, the stars, or the sun. All Adam's rage was concentrated upon the woman who called herself his daughter-in-law, and he rather pitied Frank as the victim of her wiles than blamed him for his folly.

After drinking another glass of whisky without any perceptible effect on his spirits, he

summoned his servant and started for home. Three hours later he arrived at Brandwood. How different was its aspect from that of the gloomy and smoke polluted town he had so lately left ! Spring was bursting forth in all its glory. The park was covered with verdure, and pied with violets and daisies ; the chestnuts in the avenue were donning their livery of green ; hundreds of swallows were darting hither and thither in chase of invisible flies ; a skylark was singing its sweet carol aloft ; the rooks in the lime-trees were cawing a lusty chorus ; and as the rays of the setting sun fell on the old hall, with its dormer windows, its quaint gargoyles, its gray, lichen-grown roof, and its ivy-mantled walls, it seemed to Adam that he had never seen anything so beautiful, and his heart filled with exultation and pride ; for he was as fond of the place as if he had inherited it from a long line of acred ancestors. But the feeling was only momentary, and when he remembered that Brandwood could not long be his, would never be his son's, and might pass to one whom he regarded as an alien and an

impostor, he bent his head and his eyes filled with tears.

When Rachel, as was her habit, met her husband in the hall, she saw that something was wrong, and led him into the morning-room, where she had been sitting alone.

"What is it, Adam?" she said anxiously. "No more bad news, I hope."

"It's not very good, Rachel, my poor lass; almost as bad, it seems to me, as losing Frank."

And then he told her the miserable story he had already told to Basel, to Bruff, and to Kean. He kept nothing back; and for the first time he imparted to her his scheme for founding a family, and the hope he had entertained of one day seeing Frank member for Redburn.

Rachel heard him quietly to the end. When he had finished she gave a sigh of relief. She had feared something much more calamitous. Her husband's words and manner had made her apprehensive that some terrible misfortune might have befallen Mabel and Fritz, or that Valérie, whom she had not seen for several days, had become hopelessly insane.

"It is very bad, Adam," she said, "and I am very sorry that poor Frank should have been so led away, and, what is worse, deceived us; but we ought to be thankful it is no worse."

"Why, how could it be worse, Rachel?"

"It would have been worse if this had come to light after he and Valérie were married. Oh, Adam, what should we have done?"

This was a new idea to Adam. He had been so preoccupied with his own peculiar trouble that he had given little thought to the troubles—actual or potential—of others.

"It is bad enough," he replied, after a pause. "Just think: I may have to pay this hussy fifteen hundred a year, and, as likely as not, her child will get Brandwood."

"Why, I thought you wanted Frank's child to have it."

"But not Lydia Fell's; and who knows whether it is his child or not? It is as like as not one as she has picked up over yon."

"There are ways of finding that out, I suppose. But if it can be proved to be Frank's lawful child I don't see why the prospect of its

coming into Brandwood should disturb you so much. We cannot take the estate with us. It will have to go to somebody. I don't like Lydia Fell any more than you do. But we could have the lad here—I daresay the mother would be willing enough to part with him—and bring him up as our own. The house would be brighter with a child in it, and we should soon forget that it was anybody's but Frank's." As Rachel spoke her voice trembled, and her loving eyes were wet with tears.

"Nay, we will have none of Lydia Fell's brats in this house," rejoined Adam, but in a much less resolute tone than Rachel had expected. A few days previously such a suggestion would have put him in a rage, and been indignantly rejected.

"She is a right bad one," he continued. "I wonder how she managed so to befool Frank, Rachel?"

"Poor Frank! He was very weak, I'm afraid, and she very designing. But don't you think, Adam, that we have been more to blame than Frank?"

"What way—what could we have done different?"

"We should not have left Moorwell; or, if we had, we should not have come so far away as this. We ought to have kept him more with us. Instead of that we threw him into Lydia Fell's way—a girl that we knew next to nothing about—at an age when young men are most flighty and foolish. It was not wise; it was exposing them both to temptation. She thought Frank a great catch, and it was only natural, perhaps, that she should try to entrap him. But the person most to blame is that brother of hers. The moment he saw anything going on between them he should have stopped it, or told you. Instead of that he helped it on—maybe planned it from the first."

"He did; there is no doubt about that, and he is prompting Lydia now. That is what vexes me. I hate being deceived, and I cannot abide being beat. It may come to what you say in the end, Rachel, but Stephen Fell has not got the better of me yet. We will see what this Kean can do before we talk of throwing up

the sponge. He's sharp ; he'll happen find out something as will put a spoke in their wheel."

Rachel sighed. She abhorred all strife, and could not think that any good would come of the contest in which her husband had engaged.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SUSPECTED FLAW.

ADAM did not forget his promise to Kean. He sent him, the very next day, Lydia Fell's receipt for the two thousand pounds, in consideration of which she undertook to quit England and release Frank from his engagement to marry her.

By return of post he received a letter to the following effect :

"BLACKTHORNE *v.* BLACKTHORNE.

"DEAR SIR,

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, the document I have received from you to-day points to the possibility of a serious flaw in the plaintiff's case. I cannot, however, pronounce positively until I have some further information,

and to this end I shall feel obliged if you will favour me with a call at your earliest convenience.—I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

“CHRISTOPHER KEAN.

“ADAM BLACKTHORNE, Esq., Moorwell.”

Half an hour after receiving this missive the master of Moorwell was speeding towards Manchester as fast as a pair of his fleetest horses could take him. With the exception of a short halt at Bury, the coachman did not draw rein until he pulled up opposite the seedy-looking entrance to Cutbill and Kean's office in King-street.

Adam had no tedious waiting this time. Mr. Kean was at liberty, and a minute after his name had been sent in he was requested to step forward.

“Ah, Mr. Blackthorne—glad to see you!” exclaimed the lawyer, smiling cheerily above the barricade of foolscap and parchment of which his writing-table seemed to be chiefly composed. “I thought you would come. Take a seat, please. You have brought a fine morning with you. I

hope you left Mrs. Blackthorne quite well. I need hardly ask how you are, you look so rosy. Ah! I wish I could live in the country—there is nothing I would like better—but it is quite out of the question; I have not the time. I live as far out as I can, though. Near Cheetham Hill—you know Cheetham Hill, of course?”

“Yes, I know Cheetham Hill,” answered Adam, with just a shade of impatience in his voice. “I passed it this morning. As soon as ever I got your letter I set off, and I have driven through in little more than two hours.”

“Have you, really! Why, that beats the coach! You must have capital horses. And, now, about your case. You would see by my letter that I think I have found a flaw—only think, mind—for all I can say at present is that I see the possibility of a flaw. Whether there really is one or not depends on circumstances of which I am as yet not fully informed, and as to which precise information may not easily be obtained. I gather from the document I received yesterday—Miss Fell’s receipt and release to your son—that his name was Francis Adam?”

Adam nodded assent.

"He was christened Francis Adam, I suppose?"

"Not christened—we are Baptists, and don't christen—he was only named."

"No matter; it's all the same—legally at least, whatever it may be theologically. But, according to this extract from the marriage book of the Collegiate Church, he was married—or somebody else—in the name of Frank Blackthorne."

"Does that make any difference?"

"It may make a great deal of difference. Was Miss Fell aware, do you suppose, that your son's correct designation was Francis Adam?"

"Of course she was; she could not miss."

"But can we prove it? Moral certainty is not legal proof."

"Isn't that paper you have there sufficient proof? It is in Lydia Fell's handwriting, and signed by her, and she describes him as Francis Adam."

"I am afraid not. You see it was written after the marriage; and what we want is evidence that

she knew before the marriage. The fact that she spontaneously thus described him might possibly serve to corroborate some more positive evidence ; alone it is nothing. You say she could not miss knowing. Could you swear she knew—that you have, for instance, heard her address him as Francis Adam, or your son so addressed by others in her presence ?”

“I could not justly say at this moment,” rejoined Adam, after a pause. “I shall have to think. Is it important ?”

“So important that, if we can prove that Lydia Fell at the time of the marriage knew that your son’s name was Francis Adam, it is null and void—in short, no marriage at all. If she did not know, and was no party to the deception, then the marriage stands good, provided, of course, the other side can prove the identity of your son with the Frank Blackthorne who went through a form of marriage with Lydia Fell at the Collegiate Church.”

“They’ll do that easy enough.”

“Not so easily as you think. Your son is dead, and cannot be produced. A man calling

himself Frank Blackthorne, of Warrington, was married to Lydia Fell—that we allow. But it remains to be proved that this man and your son, Francis Adam Blackthorne, are one and the same person. Don't you see?"

"But will not the witnesses and the parson be able to swear to him?"

"That depends whether or not they knew him as your son—as Francis Adam Blackthorne, in fact. I don't say, mind you, that they will not be able to prove the marriage in the end; but they will not find it very easy, and I shall admit nothing."

"If they get hold of Stephen Fell he will prove it fast enough."

"Ah! he was one of the witnesses. He knew your son well, I suppose?"

"He was our head bookkeeper, and lived at Moorwell. It was him as planned it all."

"Did he know your son's full name, do you suppose?"

"Of course he did—as well as I know it myself."

"But is it susceptible of legal proof?"

"I should think so. Frank always signed his name 'F. A. Blackthorne'—sometimes 'Francis A.'—never Frank in a business letter. He had my procuration, and signed cheques in the same way. These were always coming under Stephen's notice. Letters used to come to him addressed in full. Stephen could not miss but see them. I think, too, his name always appears in the books as 'Francis' or 'F. A.'"

"In the books of account kept by Stephen Fell?"

"Yes, in the ledger and cashbook and that. As soon as ever I get back I will look."

"Those entries you speak of would be in Stephen Fell's handwriting, I suppose?"

"Of course, that is what I mean."

"Capital, capital!" said Kean, rubbing his hands, and showing his sharp white teeth. "We shall win yet, I do believe. We have strong presumptive proof already. Stephen Fell knew your son's name. He was a witness to the marriage, and, therefore, a party to the fraud. If he says his sister did not know also—his sister who lived in the same house with him,

and whom he was in the habit of seeing every day—he won't find many people to believe him. And the other side will be obliged to call him, for without his evidence they cannot prove the marriage. The second witness, Mark Binyon, as I have ascertained, is one of the pew openers of the Collegiate Church. I don't think he knew your son; nor that Mr. Harvey, the chaplain, knew him either."

"I am sure they did not," put in Adam.

"Then they must call Stephen Fell—very fortunately for us—for I imagine we should have some difficulty in finding him."

"Difficulty! It's much if we could find him at all, and if we did he would not come. He is somewhere in America."

"Hawke will find him. You may be sure of that; and it will go hard if we do not prove out of his own mouth that his sister was a consenting party to the fraud. I shall retain Serjeant Pumpendry forthwith. He will drag the truth out of him if anybody can. All the same, we must leave no stone unturned to find corroborative evidence. Anything of a docu-

mentary character would be simply invaluable. A letter, for instance, addressed by Lydia to your son as 'Francis A.' would settle the matter at once. Perhaps you may discover something of the sort amongst his papers. Failing that, you must try to ascertain if anybody remembers to have heard Miss Fell speak of him as 'Francis Adam,' or addressed by that name in her hearing."

"I will do my best. When will the trial come off, do you think? I thought it was a Chancery case."

"So it is. But it must end in a trial at the Assizes. Lydia Fell—Lydia Blackthorne she calls herself—has instituted proceedings in Chancery to procure a revocation of the grant of administration, which you obtained as your son's next of kin. We answer by denying the marriage. The next step will be for the Court of Chancery to send down the main issue—the proof of marriage—to be tried by a jury at the Assizes, so as to enable the Chancery Judge to come to a right decision in the matter. When Hawke gets wind of the settlement, as

by means of the bill of discovery he is sure to do, he may file a bill for specific performance of your engagement to charge the Brandwood estate with an annuity of fifteen hundred a year in favour of your son's widow. But that also will depend on the verdict."

"And the child?"

"They are evidently keeping the child in the background for the present. Perhaps, as it is supposed to have been born in America, there may be some difficulty in proving its birth. For, as you are doubtless aware, unless it can be established that it came into the world within a certain time after your son's death, it will not be deemed either his next of kin or heir-at-law. Or Hawke, in order to swell his costs, may intend to make the child's claim the subject of another and subsequent action. But that is a matter of secondary importance. It will be time enough to consider it when the marriage is proved or disproved."

"Altogether, then, Mr. Kean, you think we have a good case?"

"Say, rather, hopeful. If you can find con-

instance, the heading of Frank's account in the private ledger, he had put it down in full, "Francis Adam Blackthorne." There would be no difficulty in proving that these entries were made by Stephen—the fact could be sworn to by Adam himself and by every clerk in the office.

So far as the brother went it was a clear case, but as touching the sister the most minute and repeated quests brought to light only one scrap of evidence from which might be inferred her knowledge of the fact in question. The inference, moreover, was far from being an inevitable one. Frank had evidently destroyed every written record of his connection with Lydia—if he had ever possessed any—for the only piece of paper found in his desk in any way relating to her was the back of a letter addressed to "F. A. Blackthorne, Esq.," and bearing the Manchester postmark of a date a few days prior to the alleged marriage. From a comparison of the handwriting with that of the receipt there could be little doubt that this address had been penned by Lydia; and the postmark and date pointed to the conclusion

CHAPTER VIII.

SEARCHING FOR EVIDENCE.

ADAM BLACKTHORNE'S worst enemies could not accuse him of lack of promptitude in matters of business, and even if he had been an indolent man his anxiety to upset Frank's marriage would have caused him to use all possible diligence in acting on his lawyer's advice. The day after his visit to Manchester he made careful search through all the papers likely to contain the proof so much desired by Mr. Kean.

Of Stephen Fell's knowledge of Frank's surname the most ample evidence was forthcoming. Every time the former had written the name in the cashbook and elsewhere—and he had written it some scores of times—it appeared as "F. A."—never as "Frank Blackthorne"—while in one

she considered Lydia rather forward in making the observation, and, to show her displeasure, had not deigned to reply.

Adam regarded his daughter's testimony as weighty and conclusive. He thought it rendered victory certain. Not so Mr. Kean.

"I do not for a moment question Mrs. Fritz Basel's statement," he said, when his client had acquainted him with its purport. "To my mind, indeed, it is, as you deem it, conclusive. But you must remember that we have to consider its effects on the minds of a jury, minimised as it will be by the sophistications of a clever advocate. It is more than a year since the conversation took place. When the action is tried it will be a year and a half. Your daughter made no record of the conversation at the time of its occurrence—she keeps no diary, I presume?"

Adam gave a negative shake of his head.

"It is therefore purely an affair of memory. The memory is proverbially treacherous. If it be treacherous as regards incidents, as regards spoken words it is utterly untrustworthy. Then,

too, Mrs. Fritz Basel has a strong personal interest in the result of the trial, not merely a sentimental interest such as your daughter could not fail to have, but as your heiress. It depends upon the issue of the case whether her child—if she has one—or Lydia Fell's inherits the Brandwood estate. It is scarcely possible in these circumstances that her evidence can be impartial. It will be more or less warped by the feeling of hostility to the plaintiff and her cause, which she would be something more than human not to entertain. Mrs. Fritz's testimony, therefore, must be taken rather as the expression of a strong belief than as proof of a fact. This will be the line of argument adopted by the other side, and it is so plausible that it can hardly fail to tell with the jury. Nevertheless I shall call your daughter as a witness. If we cannot win a verdict by one overwhelming piece of evidence—a single powerful stroke as it were—we must try the effect of a multitude of feebler strokes—make up by numbers what we lack in strength."

As for the letter back, Kean had already informed Adam that, while not without value, it

was less valuable than might at first appear. Everything would depend upon the opinion of the experts in handwriting who would have to be consulted and called; and the evidence of experts in caligraphy was very much like that of mad doctors—what one of them affirms another could be got to deny. Altogether, as could easily be seen, the lawyer was far from sanguine as to the result, and it seemed to Adam that his confidence grew less as the hour of trial drew near. The case was following precisely the course which Kean in the first instance had anticipated. After his answer traversing the bill filed in the Palatine Court of Chancery, the Judge had ordered certain issues to be tried at the Assizes. Hence the case, though beginning in Equity, would be virtually decided by a jury and a Common Law Judge. For if the plaintiff succeeded in proving the marriage, Adam could prolong the fight only by raising legal quibbles, which would not affect the ultimate issue, and profit only the lawyers.

CHAPTER IX.

ADAM ORDERS A LOCK-OUT.

MEANWHILE the approaching trial, and the strange circumstances out of which it had arisen, were the talk of all the country side. The merits of it were debated almost nightly in every public-house between Redburn and Orrington. People took sides on the question. Some were for Adam, others for Mrs. Frank Blackthorne, as she called herself and was generally spoken of. The factory operatives of the neighbourhood were among her warmest partisans. If her claims could have been put to the vote she would have won by an overwhelming majority. Working people looked upon her as almost one of themselves. True, she had never been a weaver or a winder, but her brother had been

bookkeeper at Moorwell, and she had occupied an almost menial position in the Blackthorne household. Adam's repudiation of his son's marriage was ascribed to pure pride and malevolence. He was a tyrant and an oppressor, people said, using his position and his vast wealth to crush a beautiful and virtuous girl, whose only offence had been falling in love with his own son. The women were, of course, nearly all for Lydia.

Lydia and her adviser, Charley Hawke, were not slow to take advantage of this popular enthusiasm for her cause. She showed herself everywhere. Hawke drove her about in his phaeton. One day they carried the war into the enemy's camp by driving past Moorwell just as the factories were "loosing." Lydia was, of course, dressed in her widow's weeds, and she looked so sad, so pretty, and so interesting, that some of the hands gave her a hearty cheer.

When Adam heard of this he pretended to treat the incident with indifference; yet, as will speedily be seen, he did not forget it. Then, at the suggestion of a friend of Charley Hawke, a subscription was started towards Mrs. Frank

Blackthorne's legal expenses, and in the course of two or three weeks as many hundred pounds were either paid or promised—to the lawyer's great delight, for he began to perceive that, lose who might, he was in a fair way to gain. Among the subscribers to the fund were many persons of condition, more than one of whom, it was rumoured, had called upon Lydia for the purpose of personally tendering their sympathy and expressing their best wishes for her success.

The newspapers were, of course, constrained to take some notice of the matter; though, as it was *sub judice*, they could do little more than mention the fact of the approaching trial, and the circumstances, so far as they were known, out of which it had arisen. The *Redburn Rooster*, however, ventured to go farther than this. It was the Tory organ of the town, and, Adam Blackthorne being both a Radical and a Dissenter, it could not resist the temptation of gibbeting an opponent. In an article entitled "A Radical at Home," it held the master of Moorwell up to public odium, stigmatised him as a tyrant at home and a hypocrite abroad, and

called upon its readers to give a generous support to the cause of truth and justice, meaning thereby the cause of Mrs. Frank Blackthorne.

Adam showed this production to his lawyer, who was extremely anxious to indict the writer of the article and the proprietor of the paper for slander, and to move the Chancery Court to punish their audacity in commenting on a case *sub judice* by committing them for contempt. But Adam, thinking one lawsuit at a time was enough, would only permit Kean to write to the *Rooster* people demanding an apology, and threatening them with all sorts of pains and penalties if the offence should be repeated. The apology, as dictated by Kean—and which was as abject as the provocation had been wanton and illegal—was made, and the *Rooster* was careful thereafter to give no further cause for complaint.

These manifestations were a revelation to Adam. As he observed to Basel, he never knew before how many enemies he had, nor what it was to be well hated.

“Ah, friend Blackthorne,” observed his

partner sententiously, "all rich men have their enemies, and every prosperous man is hated by his neighbours. You are both rich and prosperous, and all who covet your wealth and are jealous of your rise—and have nothing to hope from you—have now an opportunity of safely gratifying their feelings by siding with Lydia Fell. Then, we must not forget that hers is the popular cause. I daresay, if the truth were known, many, if not most, of your own hands would throw up their hats for her to-morrow, if they dared."

"I know they would," rejoined Adam dryly. "They did as much the other day; they cheered her as she went by—her and Charley Hawke's wife. All the same, Basel, it is not right. Don't I pay 'em their wages? There's fifteen hundred here, to say nothing of those at your place; and for one as comes to the factory there's three as stops at home. That makes more than five thousand mouths as I find food for every week of their lives. What would become of them, think you, if I were to stop the tap—shut the place up? They would not be so prodigal then."

"Probably not; but then, you know, friend Blackthorne, there are always two ways of looking at a question. Your workpeople may possibly think that their labour has made you what you are. If you could get at their real opinion, it might even be found that they believe the obligation to be on your side rather than on theirs."

"Happen. But their belief would not make it so. It stands to reason that the man as provides work for folks, and pays money, confers an obligation on them as receives it. There is no getting over that. Am I not under an obligation to my customers? I will take my hat off any time to a man as gives me a good order."

"By the same rule, you would take off your hat to a tenant who pays you a good rent?"

"And glad to do it, if it would be any satisfaction to him. I look on a farmer as does his duty by the land, and is always up to time with his rent, as a good customer, and I always try to treat him accordingly. As for the hands, I only expect them to treat me with the respect as is due

to him as pays. If they don't, it will be worse for 'em—that's all."

A few days after this conversation Adam learnt, in a rather unpleasant way, that his theory of the relations that ought to subsist between employer and employed did not obtain general acceptance—or, at any rate, was not always acted upon—among those whom it most nearly concerned—his own workpeople.

He happened to be leaving Moorwell one evening at "loosing" time. As the hands were beginning to pour through the factory gates he was stepping into the gig which was to convey him to Brandwood Hall. At the same moment, and, as appeared at a given signal, there arose from the sea of shawled heads and paper caps a loud, prolonged, and unmistakable hiss. There were even cries of "Shame!" and "Tyrant!" Adam looked sharply round with glittering eyes, and there was a portentous tremor on his lips and a hot flush on his cheeks.

"Tell Pearson I want him," he exclaimed to his groom, who stood at the horse's head.

In three minutes Pearson, the manager, was on the spot.

"We won't start to-morrow, Pearson. You can make a holiday of it."

"What! None of the engines?"

"None of 'em."

"When shall I tell the hands to come, then?"

"When I give orders, and not before."

Whereupon Adam gave his mare a sharp cut with the whip, and, being a high-spirited creature, she went off in the direction of Brandwood at her fastest trot.

"You hear," shouted Pearson to the work-people, most of whom had been waiting to see the upshot of the incident, "you have not to come to-morrow. And I don't know when we are to start again nayther—not till th' mayster gives orders, he says."

The lads and lasses laughed—the prospect of lakeing (playing) a day or two being by no means disagreeable to them—but the older people—fathers and mothers with many little mouths to feed—looked far from pleased, and

they went home full of misgivings touching the next week's supply of porridge.

For three days the Moorwell engines did not turn round. Every morning when Pearson applied to the "old master" (as he was still called, albeit there was no more a young one) for instructions, he received the same answer—"Not yet." On the third morning, instead of Pearson, there came a deputation. It consisted of three women—Betty Twirler, Jane o' Jonathan's, and Mally-fro'-th'-Green—all "old hands," good weavers—two of them mothers of families and great favourites with their master.

Mally-fro'-th'-Green opened the conversation.

"We've come to ax yo', mayster," she said, "when we can start ageean."

"I don't know, Mally; not just yet."

"But what will become on us? We shall aw be clemming (starving) soon."

"Dunnot you think, mayster," put in Betty Twirler, "as it is rather hard to clem us aw just because some o' th' young 'uns has been foolish? It worn't reyt to hiss yo'; we dunnot howd wi' it a bit—dun we, Jane?"

"No, we dunnot; nor nobody else wi' ony sense nayther. And there worn't mony on 'em as dud hiss—nobbut a two thry o' th' young 'uns."

"A two thry hundred, you mean, Jane," said Adam.

"Well, we dudn't," exclaimed Betty Twirler.

"I am sure you did not, Betty."

"Well, what do yo' lock us out for then?"

"I was like to make an example, you know," was Adam's rather weak answer to this home thrust.

"Well," said Mally-fro'-th'-Green, "lass and woman I've wrought here gooin' i' thirty year. I worked for yo' when yo' started th' Owd Factory, and this is th' fust time as I've bin locked out; and torn out I never would. And aw up o' account o' that theer Lydia Fell—wi' her stuck-up ways and her white eebraes (eyebrows)—as I never could abide."

"Nor me nayther," affirmed Betty Twirler.

"Nor me nayther," echoed Jane o' Jonathan's.

"Hoo's a besom," put in Mally.

"Hoo's a hussy," exclaimed Jane.

"Hoo's a gradely good-for-nowt, and no moor wed to th' young mayster than I am mysel," said Betty Twirler, by way of bringing matters to a climax.

"And now, mayster," asked Mally-fro'-th'-Green, putting her arms akimbo with an air rather of command than entreaty, "when con we start—me, as has been here gooin' i' thirty year; Jane theer, as has been working for yo' nearly as long; and Betty, as has never wrought nowheer else? And we have sixteen childer between us—Jane and me—and not aboon hoaf on 'em as addles (earns) owt—and th' badge (grocer) to pay, and th' rent and coils, and th' clogger. And there's a Scotchman (travelling draper) coming to our house next week as wants fifteen shilling on me, and he says if he does not get it he'll sell us up. And, bithmon, I believe he's i' arnest."

"Very well," said Adam, who was really glad of an excuse to recommence work, "send, Pearson here, and I'll give him orders to start to-morrow."

"Couldn't yo' say one o'clock to-day, mayster, and let us work till eight to-neet? It 'ud mak

a difference of seven hours, and we shall hev fearfu' little brass to draw o' Saturday, strive as we will."

"If they can get the steam up in time I have no objection; but I would not have done it for anybody else, lasses."

"They're getting it up awready," observed Jane o' Jonathan's with a smile. "They set agate (began) when we agreed to come and see yo'."

"Ay, I daresay," rejoined Adam. "They know I am always soft when I'm tackled by a woman; and three together is more than either me or any man else could cope wi'."

And then there was a hearty laugh all round, and the three weavers ran off to announce the good news to their friends, who were waiting outside. Two hours later Moorwell Mills were once more in full swing.

"They will not hiss me any more, I think," muttered Adam, as the door closed behind his visitors.

He was right; his hands never hissed him again.

CHAPTER X.

THE DRY COMPANY.

ALTHOUGH The Bay Mare was not quite the first of Redburn inns—that position being by general consent assigned to The Bull's Head—it was nevertheless a highly-respectable and well-accustomed house, and one of the oldest in the town. Its liquors were of the best ; the snugness of its bar-parlour left nothing to be desired ; and the hostess, Mrs. Poker, who, albeit forty, was neither fat nor fair, enjoyed a deserved popularity among her customers.

For many years Adam Blackthorne had put up at The Bay Mare on his weekly visits to Redburn market ; nor would he ever have put up anywhere else had not Mrs. Poker refused, on two several occasions, to give a vote to

the candidates whose success he had at heart.

It must not be inferred from this circumstance that at the time in question the ladies of Redburn possessed the parliamentary franchise. But if Mrs. Poker was not herself an elector she owned one, which amounts to pretty much the same thing. She had a husband whose name was on the electoral roll of the borough—a husband who belonged to her, body and soul. He was a quiet little man, with a bald head, straw-coloured whiskers, and a subdued manner. He acted as butler to the establishment, went errands when he was sober (which was not often), and made himself generally useful. The frequenters of the house always called him “Tom.” He was never by any chance addressed as “Mr. Poker.” Except in one particular, he obeyed his wife with the promptness and docility of a trained spaniel—he would not refrain from drink. Not that he refused verbal obedience; nobody could be more profuse in promises. The misfortune was that he never kept them. Do what she would, Mrs. Poker could not keep Tom

sober, and he rarely went to bed less than half drunk. In all other things, however, he rendered faithful service, and invariably voted as his wife bade him—often despite strong temptations to the contrary. At every election attempts were made to bottle him. But as Will Dayman, one of the most faithful customers of The Bay Mare, remarked, you might as well try to bottle a brewery; for Tom Poker, let him be as tipsy as he would, never lost control of his legs. He might not be able to see, perhaps, but he could always contrive to walk, and did walk when his would-be bottlers were lying under the table or rolling in the gutter.

It is hardly necessary to say that nobody in Redburn ever committed the absurdity of asking Tom how he proposed to vote. His wife, on the other hand, was always assiduously canvassed by the representatives of both political parties; and though, on one or two occasions, when very hard pressed by the Liberals, she bestowed upon them one vote, she had latterly given her undivided support to their opponents.

Now, it was the custom at Redburn, when an

election was in prospect, for the leading Liberals and Conservatives to call upon their principal supporters, especially those of them who were large employers of labour, to do all they could for the cause which they respectively favoured. This meant securing, by every means in their power, the votes of such of their workpeople as possessed the franchise, and of the tradesmen with whom they had dealings—a proceeding which in local parlance was known as “putting on the screw.”

Moorwell being outside the borough, Adam Blackthorne had no voters in his employ, nor was he an elector himself. Nevertheless, he did his best for his party; and, as he was at the head of a large concern, his influence was considerable. He had large accounts with sundry Redburn tradesmen. Being a good paymaster, his custom was highly esteemed; but no shop-keeper or mill-furnisher who did not vote for at least one of the Liberal candidates had much chance of getting an order at Moorwell. Adam saw no wrong in this. The other side did the same; and did not landowners always control

the votes of their tenants? He even went so far as to change his doctor because that gentleman's political principles, or rather his votes, were not to his liking.

"Let him sell his physic to the Tories," he said; "I'll none of it."

When Mrs. Poker gave both of her votes to the Tory candidates, instead of giving one to each side, as she had formerly done, he signified his displeasure by dropping the two or three glasses of whisky he had been wont to consume on market days to one. When she committed the offence a second time he left The Bay Mare altogether, and betook himself thenceforth to The Bull's Head.

The landlady of The Bay Mare, like most of her sex, was not much of a politician. She had many prejudices, but few principles. She knew, however, on which side her bread was buttered; and the proceeding that lost her the custom of Adam Blackthorne secured her the much more valuable custom of the Dry Company. The Dry Company—presumably so called because the members of it were generally thirsty—consisted

of a number of Redburn tradesmen, who met every night of the week in the bar-parlour of The Bay Mare to discuss the affairs of the nation—from a strictly Conservative point of view—and retail the gossip of the neighbourhood. There might be a dozen of them, all told. The most regular attendants at the symposium were the Will Dayman already mentioned, who lived on his means and a few commissions he earned as agent in heald yarn and gold thread, which he sold exclusively to Tory manufacturers; Peter Pigskin, a political saddler and harness-maker; Paul Purge, a constitutional apothecary; George Pincop, a cotton-spinner of correct principles; and Richard Roe, managing clerk to Garlick, Onions, and Sage, the mustiest and most orthodox firm of legal practitioners in the town. The most important and highly-esteemed frequenter of Mrs. Poker's bar-parlour, however, was Isaac Grains, a wealthy brewer, and the owner of The Bay Mare. As he owned, besides, many other public-houses in the borough his influence was invaluable to his party, and his utterances were always treated

with profound respect by his cronies of the Dry Company. Grains was strictly orthodox, his loyalty to the Crown being only exceeded by his devotion to the Church and his reverence for the Bible. If his education had not unfortunately been neglected in early youth he would probably have been one of the borough members. Not that the free-and-easy electors of Redburn were particularly exacting in the matter of literary qualifications. Mere faults of orthography they could pardon, and the misuse of the aspirate in a community by whom the letter "H" was either generally ignored or deliberately despised was rather a recommendation than a cause of offence. But the line must be drawn somewhere, and even the most ardent admirer of ancient institutions might hesitate to vote for a man who wrote "i" when he meant "I," spoke of his opponents as "them theer rascally Radicals," and of the liquor he brewed as "that theer beer." Nevertheless, Grains had his hopes. Wealth and the will to spend it, together with sufficient sense to vote straight, are sometimes preferred by constituencies to intellect and learning; and before

the brewer died he had the proud satisfaction of writing after his name the magic letters "M.P.," which he probably esteemed all the more highly that he had paid for them at the rate of five thousand pounds apiece.

On a certain evening, some two or three months after the events related in the last chapter, several of the members of the Dry Company, were assembled in Mrs. Poker's bar-parlour, and a very pleasant bar-parlour it was. A bright fire burnt merrily in a wide old-fashioned grate, on the hob end whereof was planted a huge highly-polished copper kettle, the steam from the curved spout of it curling gracefully up the chimney. On either side of the fireplace was a capacious comfortable-cushioned arm-chair. In one of these chairs sat slender Will Dayman; in the other reposed the portly form of Grains the brewer. The remainder of the company present were seated on benches ranged round the wall. The side of the room opposite the fireplace was occupied by a rack filled with glittering crystal, from the midst of which stood out half-a-dozen copper-bound spirit barrels, like

a brigade of field guns escorted by a regiment of light cavalry. On a large mahogany table in the centre of the room lay a multitude of long clay pipes, interspersed with many toddy tumblers, wherefrom rose a savoury odour of rum, whisky, nutmeg, and lemon, for the mixing of the ingredients—without a due consumption of which a right discussion of the affairs of the nation had been impossible—was in active operation.

“I don’t think as this ’ere whisky,” observed the saddler, as he watched carefully the effect of commingling water with spirit, “is as good as Mrs. Poker used to give us. Seems to me as there is more o’ that what-d’-you-call it—that fuzleum ile in it.”

“Fusil hoil, not fuzleum ile, Pigskin,” said Purge, with a smile of superiority.

“Fusil, then. Drat it, there’s so many words nowadays as one can hardly mind ’em all, much less pronounce ’em right. I don’t know what folks wants with so many words. What do they say fusil for?—why cannot they say whisky ile—hoil, I mean—I wonder? Everybody would know what they meant then. But don’t you

think, Purge, as this whisky is just rather new ? I only drank six glasses last night, and—you will hardly believe it—but I was really a bit unfine this morning.”

“You are losing your head, Pigskin, that’s what it is,” put in Dayman ; “ the whisky’s right enough. It does not make my head ache, and I knock plenty of it into me.”

“ I always stick to rum,” remarked the brewer, who, having mixed his liquor, was proceeding to fill his pipe. “ Do you know why ? ”

Whereupon the company promptly said no, albeit Grains had asked and answered the same question times without number, and everybody knew what was coming.

“ Because—because after the battle of Trafalgar——”

At this moment the brewer lost for a moment the attention of his auditors. They were all looking at a newcomer who had just entered the room ; for although the bar-parlour of The Bay Mare was occupied at nights chiefly by the Dry Company, it was open as well to the general public. Yet it rarely happened for an entire

stranger to be seen therein ; and the individual who had just put in an appearance was unknown to any member of the company, and seemingly not a townsman. He might be about twenty-five or thirty years old, had a very yellow face, huge sandy whiskers, long curly hair, wore green spectacles, and his clothes were clearly not of the Redburn cut.

“ Good-evening, gentlemen,” he said, and then taking a seat ordered a glass of rum and lighted a pipe.

“ As I was saying,” remarked Grain, when his friends had done staring at the newcomer, “ I always drinks rum, because, after the battle of Trafalgar, Lord Nelson’s body was brought home in a puncheon of it. I honours the memory of Lord Nelson, therefore I drinks rum. And I think too, gentlemen, as what was good for his outside cannot miss being good for my inside.”

“ And quite right you are too, Mr. Grains,” observed Pincop. “ I look upon rum as the national spirit ; it has made us what we are. Look at our sailors, how they carried all afore

'em in the last war! Do you think they could have done what they did without rum—roast beef and rum? Where would they have been, and where would the country have been, if they had had nowt to eat and drink but frogs and sour wine, like them French?"

"Ah, those were glorious times!" said Dayman, who posed as the literary character of the company; "no Reform Bills then, no Chartists, no Corn-law League, no teetotalers, no infernal railways cutting up the country and marring the beauty of the scenery——"

"And none of them theer Radical beggars going up and down making speeches and disturbing folks' minds. As for that Corn-law League, I look upon it as a d—— dissenting do. It is Corn Laws now; it will be the Church next. There's Bright, one of th' leaders, he is a Quaker; there's Fox, he is a hinfidel; and there's Cobden, he's a—he's a——"

"Churchman," suggested the stranger with the sandy whiskers.

"Then he's a d—— bad Churchman. I don't believe i' Churchmen as mixes with

Radicals, Corn-law Leaguers, and sich like riff-raff."

"Talking of the Corn-law League," said Dayman, "have you heard that Adam Blackthorne has subscribed a thousand pounds to the Repeal Fund?"

"Ay, he's another of 'em. Better keep his brass for that lawsuit of his with his daughter-in-law. It will cost a bonny penny, they tell me; and he is sure to lose—isn't he, Mr. Roe?"

"Sure," answered the lawyer's clerk, with an air of quiet confidence which was very impressive. "They have not a leg to stand on. They want to prove that Mrs. Francis Blackthorne—for she is as much Mrs. Francis Blackthorne as my wife is Mrs. Richard Roe—was party to a fraudulent marriage; that she let young Blackthorne call himself Frank only, when she knew all along that his name was Francis Adam."

"If they could prove that, the marriage would be no good, I suppose?"

"Of course not. But, Lord bless you! they cannot. We know, because we are Mr. Hawke's

agents. They have only got a bit of presumptive evidence, that Serjeant Buster will knock to pieces in no time; and Mrs. Francis and her brother Stephen will swear that she never knew her husband's full name before the marriage—whatever she may have known after."

"When does the trial come off?"

"Directly. The commission will be opened on Monday, and the case of Blackthorne against Blackthorne is pretty sure to be called the day after, or, at any rate, the next day."

"What has become of the child, Roe? There is one, they say; but nobody seems to have seen it," observed apothecary Purge.

"Oh yes; and all the Brandwood estate is settled on it. Mrs. Francis was obliged to leave it in America—the boy, for it is a boy, was born there, you know. He is very delicate, and the doctors thought a sea voyage might be dangerous, or even fatal, until he gets a little older. But when the trial is over Mrs. Francis will go back and bring him herself, and then he will probably be made a ward in Chancery."

"I am glad to hear you say as Blackthorne

will be beat, Mr. Roe," said Pigskin. "What business has he to have any family pride, I should like to know? Are not the Fells quite as good as him? Why, I've seen Adam Blackthorne—Squire of Brandwood, they call him now—carrying a pack of pieces up this 'ere street! But from what I hear he quite counts on winning. Mr. Basel's coachman was in my shop yesterday, and he says as Mr. Blackthorne's coachman told him as they are cocksure to win."

"Mr. Blackthorne's groom!" rejoined the brewer with much scorn. "What does Mr. Blackthorne's groom know about it? Look here, Pigskin, I'll bet you anything you like; I'll lay you ten pounds to one—twenty to one—ay, fifty to one—you or anybody else—as Adam Blackthorne loses his case."

Pigskin was silent. To have accepted the brewer's offer might have seemed like differing from him; and no member of the Dry Company had ever yet had the audacity to differ openly from Mr. Grains.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the stranger,

who could not be expected to know the unwritten law of the place, "if nobody else cares to take the bet I will. Fifty to one I think you said, that Mr. Blackthorne loses his case."

"You have the advantage of me, sir; I have not the pleasure of knowing you," answered Grains, rather rudely.

"That does not matter in the least. One man's money is as good as another's, I suppose. Here is a sovereign, which I will put into the hands of any gentleman present—or perhaps the landlady would kindly take charge of it."

"Yes, yes; give it to the landlady," exclaimed several members of the company.

"Oh, I'll stand to my offer," said Grains, who saw that if he tried to back out of it he might lose credit with his companions. "I am a man of my word. But you are a stranger. You perhaps will not be here when the result of the trial is known."

"When do you think it will be known?" looking at the lawyer's clerk.

"Let me see—this is Thursday. The Assizes begin on Monday. The result should be known

here on next Thursday, or the day after—say to-morrow week.”

“Well then,” said the stranger, handing a sovereign to Mrs. Poker, “I will try to be here on the evening of to-morrow week. If I lose the landlady will of course give you the sovereign.”

The landlady nodded assent.

“So if I lose I need not come. If, on the other hand, I win, and do not come, you will perhaps do me the favour to pay the fifty pounds to Mrs. Poker on my behalf.”

“If I lose, certainly. But I am sure to win.”

“But what must I do with it?” exclaimed the landlady. “Take care of it until you do come?”

“No, you shall give it on my behalf to some charity, or otherwise dispose of it for the public good. Can any gentleman suggest anything?”

“The restoration of the Parish Church,” said Dayman.

“The Church Missionary Society,” exclaimed Grains.

"The Dispensary," said Purge.

"The Soup Kitchens," said Pincop.

"The Blind Asylum," said Pigskin.

"No, I have it," exclaimed the stranger briskly. "Mr. Grains seems very fond of the Anti-corn-law League. If I win, Mrs. Poker, you shall hand over my winnings to the Anti-corn-law League, in the name of John Robinson, please."

"It will be your money, sir, and I shall of course follow your instructions," said the landlady.

"Thank you, Mrs. Poker. Good-evening, gentlemen."

And before the members of the Dry Company could bethink themselves what to say, Mr. John Robinson had disappeared.

"Who is he?" asked every man of his neighbour, and though nobody could answer the question, all agreed that a person who had ventured to treat Mr. Grains with such open disrespect must of necessity be an entire stranger in Redburn.

"Who he is I cannot tell," remarked the

brewer, "but what he is it is plain to see. He's a himpudent fellow; and unless I'm much mistaken, one of them theer rascally Radicals."

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGER IN NUMBER FOURTEEN.

ON the morning after this conversation, as Mr. Basel sat in his office at Moorwell, a letter, brought by special messenger from Redburn, was put into his hand. It ran as follows :

“ If Mr. Basel would render a great service to the Blackthorne family, he is urgently requested to call this afternoon, between two and three o'clock, at The Bull's Head, Redburn, for the purpose of receiving important information in reference to the approaching trial. If he inquires for the gentleman in No. 14, he will obtain an interview with the writer of this note. Meanwhile Mr. Basel is earnestly besought to keep this communication and the object of his

visit to Redburn a profound secret. If he fails herein danger will befall."

"*Donner Wetter!*" muttered Basel, after he had read and re-read this missive, "*was ist los* (what is up) now, I wonder? It might be a summons from the Holy Vehm. If I fail herein danger may befall! Danger to whom or what? Shall I be hanged at midnight in a forest, or stabbed in my bed while asleep? But I will go. I shall be glad to render a service to friend Blackthorne, and I feel very curious to know what this mystery means. One has heard before now of traps being laid in this way to rob and murder people. But no—nobody would be so mad as to attempt such a deed at a house like The Bull's Head, and by broad daylight too."

He ordered the messenger to be called in.

"Tell the gentleman who gave you this note," he said—"the gentleman in No. 14—that Mr. Basel will come. You can remember?"

"Yes, sir; I shall not forget."

"But you might. Everything is pos-

sible. See, give him this card—that will be surer.”

The card bore the words: “Mr. Basel will come.”

Four hours later, as the clock of Redburn parish church chimed three, Mr. Basel’s carriage stopped opposite The Bull’s Head.

It was a much larger house than The Bay Mare. A broad flight of steps led up to the great outer door, which, save for a few hours in the early morning, was always open. It was a busy place, and people were perpetually going in and out, for The Bull’s Head was virtually the exchange and newsroom of the town. The corridor was littered with the boxes of arriving and departing bagmen; and as Basel mounted the steps he met a group of parcel-laden and red-faced commercial travellers, who, having eaten their dinners and taken their allowance of port, sherry, and brandy-and-water, were sallying forth to call on their customers.

He went into the bar.

“Is there a gentleman staying in the house who occupies No. 14, Mrs. Broadbeam?” he

asked of the landlady, a portly dame of commanding presence, decided manner, and most unfeminine curttness of speech, who was engaged in pumping beer into a big jug.

"There is, Mr. Basel."

"Do you know his name?"

"I do not, Mr. Basel. All that I know is that he came here the day before yesterday by the Manchester coach, takes his meals in his own room, and, so far as I know, has never been out except for an hour or two last night."

"Confound the fellow!" thought Basel, "it is only a clerk from Kean's office, after all. What does he mean by sending such an absurd note, and making all this mystery?"

"Can I see this gentleman, Mrs. Broadbeam? I have business with him."

"Certainly. Here, Thomas" (raising her voice).

Whereupon Thomas, a stout little fellow, with a round red face, a red waistcoat, and a game eye—the boots and odd man of the establishment—promptly appeared.

"Take Mr. Basel to No. 14, Thomas."

"Will you come this way, sir?" said the boots, who, having much to do, was always in a hurry.

Basel went that way accordingly, and after ascending a wide stone staircase, and traversing a variety of passages, they arrived at No. 14, which, as Thomas informed him, consisted of a sitting-room and a bedroom *en suite*.

"Come in," exclaimed a deep voice, in answer to Basel's knock.

As Basel entered, his anonymous correspondent rose from an armchair in which he had been sitting, and—as appeared from a newspaper lying on the floor—reading. He was a tall, spectacled man, with long red whiskers and hair of similar hue—the same, in fact, who had laid the bet the night before with Grains the brewer, in The Bay Mare, and given the name of John Robinson.

"Ah, Mr. Basel," he exclaimed, seizing the surprised dyer's hand, and warmly shaking it, "I am glad to see you. It is very kind of you to comply so promptly with my request. I suppose you thought it very strange."

"Very," said Basel, staring very hard at his host's red whiskers. "But really, sir, you have the advantage of me. You seem to know me very well; but I cannot call to mind that I ever met you before."

"What! Is it possible—don't you really know me, Mr. Basel?"

"No," replied the dyer, after a pause, as he put on his spectacles, the better to examine the stranger's enigmatical countenance. "I cannot make you out. I thought at first you might be somebody from Kean's office, but I don't remember ever to have seen you there."

"Who is Kean?"

"You don't know who Kean is, and yet profess to have an important communication to make in reference to the approaching trial! Why, Kean is Mr. Blackthorne's lawyer."

"I thought—I thought——" rejoined the stranger. Then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, he plucked off his green spectacles.

"Do you know me now, Mr. Basel?" he exclaimed.

As Basel looked into the man's eyes they

seemed strangely familiar to him, and a suspicion crossed his mind which made him tremble and grow pale. But it went as quickly as it came. A moment's reflection sufficed to show its absurdity.

"No," he replied, after another long look at his questioner's orange-coloured face, "I do not know you even yet. You had better tell me who you are. This is only trifling, and I came here, as I supposed, for a business purpose."

"Well then, do you know me now?" said the stranger, stripping himself by two rapid movements of his red whiskers and sandy hair.

"Frank Blackthorne!" gasped Basel, who was so overcome that he had to lean against the wall for support. "It is either Frank Blackthorne or the devil."

"Yes, it is Frank Blackthorne."

"In the body?" gasped Basel, still leaning against the wall; for though he was a philosopher and a firm disbeliever in the supernatural, there are occasions in life when the best of us lack the courage of our principles.

"In the body, as you see," replied Frank, quietly and sadly.

"But it is not possible. You were burnt in the fire. Everybody said you were. I saw you fall into the flames myself. And if you were not, how did you escape?—where have you been?—why did you not tell us?—what does it all mean?"

"You will soon learn, Mr. Basel. I asked you to come here in order that I might tell you. But first of all I want you to tell me something. How are they all?—my father and mother and Mabel—Mrs. Basel and Fritz?"

"They are all in good health, I think, but much harassed—your father especially—by this most unhappy trial."

"And Valérie," said Frank, anxiously yet hesitatingly—"is she also well? I dare not ask if she is happy."

"It is very little you care about Valérie, I think, or you would not have behaved as you have done. She is pretty well in health, poor girl, but sorely troubled in spirit. We feared at times for her sanity. She has proved right

in one thing, however. She refused to believe you were dead, and has always insisted that you would come back."

"Dear Valérie! Then she never forgot me or lost hope."

"Forgot me—hope—" repeated Basel. And then he remembered the incident of the locket, and a dark thought rose in his mind. "Tell me, Frank—tell me truly—is it possible that Valérie has known all the time that you were alive? Has she been privy to this mystery, this concealment? No, it is not possible; I will not believe it."

"You wrong your daughter deeply, Mr. Basel, to suggest even the bare possibility of such a thing. If she thought I still lived it was because our love is so deep that her heart told her the truth. She knew I lived, as I should have known if she had died, by sympathy. As for my conduct, you shall judge when you have heard what I am about to tell you."

"I am afraid you are talking nonsense, Frank. I should rather say that Valérie refused to believe you were dead because she did not want

to believe, and because, as no vestige of your body could be found, there was some slight ground for hoping you might still be alive; partly, too, because of that locket which she rightly regarded as being sent by you. But that is neither here nor there. I am impatient for an explanation of the mystery. Pray go on."

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE STORY.

"My story," said Frank, "begins with the coming of the Fells to Moorwell. As you know, they were put in to take care of the old house, and, as I lunched there four or five times every week, and sometimes supped and stayed there all night, I speedily became very intimate with them. Stephen is very sharp and clever. He has no scruples, and he was not long in acquiring over me that ascendancy which a designing man of pleasant manners, who has seen the world, so easily obtains over one several years his junior, and so inexperienced as I then was. I don't want to lay on others the blame of my own folly. I have been weak—almost criminally weak—that there is no use denying ; but looking

back and passing all the circumstances in review, I can come to no other conclusion than that, from the very moment of their arrival at Moorwell, the Fells laid the train which ended in my marriage with Lydia. You know how soft and silly young fellows can be, and it was not long before I fell in love—or fancied I did—with Lydia. She can be very pleasant when she likes—though she has a queer temper of her own—and she flattered me and won my regard by those subtle little attentions to which few men of my age could be insensible. I did not fall in love with her all at once; and I am sure of this: that if I had not been thrown so much in her way I should have cared for her no more than I cared for any other girl about the place, and that the idea of marrying would never have entered my head. I was in for it before I knew what I was doing, or had given the slightest thought to the consequences. One evening on going in to supper—I was staying that night at Moorwell—I found Lydia in tears. I inquired what was the matter. She replied something about my not caring for her, and that of late I

had been less kind to her than usual. This exhibition of emotion both touched and flattered me. What I said I do not remember, but a few minutes later my arms were around her and I was kissing away her tears. While we were in this interesting position who should come in but Stephen! He naturally demanded an explanation—wanted to know if I really loved his sister, and asked if my intentions were honourable. As I had only just vowed—probably in his hearing—that I did love her, I could only repeat to him what I had said to Lydia; and as my mind up to that moment, so far as my intentions were concerned, had been a blank, I was able to say with a good conscience that they were not dishonourable.”

“‘Very well,’ said Stephen, ‘then we will consider you engaged.’

“On this it occurred to me, for the first time, that this was an arrangement to which my father might possibly object, and I mentioned my misgivings to the two Fells.

“‘Why should he object?’ asked Stephen.

“‘I am so young,’ I replied. For I did not

like to hurt their feelings by suggesting that which I thought, and saying : 'Because of Lydia's comparatively humble condition in life.'

"It was a weak answer, as Stephen soon let me know.

" 'That is easily got over,' he rejoined. 'We will keep the thing quiet until you get a bit older. You will be twenty-one in a few months, and then we will tell your father. If you and Lydia are prudent nobody need suspect anything, and I am sure I shall say nothing.'

"I was not at all sure that my father's objections to the match would diminish with time—or rather I was sure they would not. But it was something to put off the evil day, and I eagerly assented to Stephen's proposal.

"You may imagine how green I was when I tell you that I actually felt grateful to Stephen for agreeing to keep the engagement secret. I did not see that he had made the proposal entirely in his own interest and that of his sister. He knew even better than I did that my father would leave no stone unturned to prevent my marrying Lydia, and that the day

he heard of our engagement might be the last of their sojourn at Moorwell.

“From that time I was in their power. Lydia begged of me to write to her when I could not come. I agreed, and though I did not write often, or at great length, I wrote quite enough to confirm, ten times over, the promise of marriage I had verbally made. This was another link in the chain which the Fells were forging about me.

“All went on smoothly for two or three months. If I was not much enamoured of Lydia, I was at least fond of her, and I had the most unlimited confidence in Stephen. It never once occurred to me that his friendship, any more than Lydia’s love, was otherwise than disinterested. About the time I came of age he began to hint at the expediency of a secret marriage. His idea, I suppose, being that, whereas my father, if asked beforehand, might refuse his consent, he would easily be reconciled to a *fait accompli*. But I could not make up my mind to take so serious a step without the consent—the knowledge even—of my father

and mother, and I met the suggestion with a direct negative. Then he took another line—pointed out that, when it became known I had been all this time engaged to his sister—seeing her every day, and almost living in a house in which the only other person of her own sex was a young servant-of-all-work, her character would be seriously compromised.

“I admitted the force of this argument, without, however, accepting its logical conclusion—a secret marriage; and I proposed to get over the difficulty by coming less frequently to the house, and never remaining there over night.

“‘That will not do,’ observed Stephen. ‘The mischief is done. For the last two or three months you have been coming nearly every day, sometimes twice a day, and sleeping here at least twice a week. Moreover, to make a sudden change like that would be just the thing to rouse suspicion. Everybody would be asking what was the matter.’

“Then he put before me two alternatives: either to marry Lydia or tell my father of our

engagement. If I did not he said he would. He regretted being forced to take this course, yet he felt if he were to do otherwise he would be wronging his sister. His first duty was to her, and whatever were the consequences to me or himself he could not let Lydia's reputation suffer. As for the marriage it would be the easiest thing in the world to keep it quiet; he would pledge his honour not to divulge it without my consent, and Lydia, of course, in that, as in everything else, would be guided by my wishes.

"I consented. The threat of telling my father was an argument I could not resist. Of course it was very wrong—and stupid at that, as an American would say—for my father was sure to get to know sometime. But as a lad I had always stood much in awe of him—you know his high temper, and his old-fashioned ideas about the bringing up of children; and though he had latterly begun to treat me very differently, almost as an equal, in fact, I could not shake off the old feeling. I simply dared not tell him of the engagement I had been so foolish as to

contract with Lydia, and I would have consented to even more than Stephen demanded—had that been possible—to put off the evil day.

“We were married at Manchester, as you doubtless know. Stephen arranged it all—got the licence, took lodgings for Lydia, who was supposed to be away seeing a sick aunt somewhere in the Fylde, saw the parson, gave his sister away, and signed the register.”

“Was it he that proposed you should be married as Frank Blackthorne?” asked Basel.

“That was the name in which he got the licence. He arranged everything, I tell you. I was simply passive. All that I did was to present myself at the Collegiate Church, and go through a form of marriage with Lydia.”

“All!” exclaimed Mr. Basel. “*Gott im Himmel!* what would the man have? It is that ‘all’ that has done all the mischief, Frank. But tell me, was Lydia privy to the fraud—did she know your full name?”

“Of course she did.”

“Can that be proved?”

“Fully. But I will come to that point pre-

sently. Let me go on with my story. It is not a very pleasant one, and I want to get it finished."

"I am burning to know how you escaped from the fire."

"You shall soon know. I need not tell you how my father discovered my intimacy with Lydia. I daresay he has told you himself."

Basel nodded.

"But he could not tell you, because he did not know, how near I was to making a clean breast of it, and confessing all the foolishness of which I had been guilty. The words were on my lips. I had gone so far as to say I would not give Lydia up—I was just going to say I could not give her up—when he told me roughly that if I did not he would disinherit me, turn me out of the house, and exclude me from the business. Worse than this could not befall me in any case, so I just remained silent and let things take their course. I did not care enough for Lydia to sacrifice everything for her, and I thought I could trust Stephen not to divulge the marriage without my consent. Even if my

father should fulfil his threat of sending them away the secret might still be kept; for I believed as much as ever in Stephen's loyalty and Lydia's love. I believed in them until my father put into my hands Lydia's undertaking to go to America, and her virtual repudiation of our marriage, for a consideration of two thousand pounds. Then I was disenchanted with a vengeance. I saw it all then—saw how I had been led on, played with, used, deceived, and befooled. All my love was turned to hate—if ever I really did love Lydia, which is now hard to believe; but my contempt for myself, for my weakness and folly, was greater than my hatred for her and Stephen. I had, however, one consolation—they were gone, and not likely to return.

“I come now to the most painful part of my story—my relations with Valérie. I know I have been greatly to blame, yet there are extenuating circumstances which may, I hope, obtain for me your indulgence, and, perhaps, forgiveness.

“I saw Valérie, and I loved her. Loved her, did I say? I love her now, as I think

man has rarely loved woman. I love her so much that if she were to say: 'Go and kill yourself,' I would go and kill myself. If she were to say: 'Go away, and never come back,' I should go away and never come back.

"You all wondered—she wondered too—why I was so slack at declaring the love which you could hardly doubt that I felt. You know now. I was restrained by the ties that still bound me to Lydia Fell. She was far away, and I hoped and believed she would never come back. All the same I felt that it would be wrong to speak of love to Valérie so long as Lydia was alive and my wife before the law; and though it was a hard struggle, and I had to keep a constant watch over myself, I remained true to this resolution for a time that seemed to me cruelly long. But one day, when we were coming home from hunting, Valérie dropped a remark which, in my then mood, made me fancy I might have a rival. There was madness in the very thought. I forgot everything; and before I knew what I did, I had told her of my love and drawn from her a confession of hers.

“It may seem very strange, Mr. Basel, but from that moment, until after I had parted from Valérie and informed you and my father and mother of what had come to pass, I was as oblivious of the existence of any impediment to our marriage as if Lydia Fell had never been born. I could think only of my happiness. It was not until my father made a chance allusion to Lydia, and I found myself alone in my own room, and my excitement began to subside, that I bethought me of what I had done—of the cruel wrong I had inflicted on Valérie, and of the sea of trouble into which I had plunged. I passed a wretched night, and morning brought me little relief. I could see no way out of the difficulties that surrounded me—no way, at least, that I had the courage to adopt. To give up Valérie and to let the engagement go on seemed equally impossible. I could make up my mind to neither course. I was in this miserable state of indecision and mental torture when the post came. Among the papers I received was one from America. I tore off the cover, which was addressed in Stephen Fell’s handwriting, with a certitude that any-

thing sent by him could bode me no good. Imagine, then, my feelings when I found in the paper a marked paragraph giving an account of the death of Lydia Fell. She had been drowned by the overturning of a boat on the Hudson, near Albany. I could hardly believe my eyes. I read the paragraph a hundred times. I felt like a man who has escaped from a mortal danger. I was raised at once from the depths of despair to a state of happiness greater even than I had felt the evening before, when Valérie gave me the assurance of her love. I showed the paragraph to my father. He attributed my emotion to the shock caused by news so startling and unexpected, and to some lingering affection that he supposed I still entertained for Lydia. It did not occur to either of us that the news might be false—the more especially as it was reported a few days later in the *Redburn Rooster*—and I consequently took no steps to obtain confirmation of it. It was too good not to be true.

“I need not tell you about our courtship—how happy we were, how the time was fixed for

our marriage and that of Mabel and Fritz, and how the days flew past on golden wings.

“It proved to be a fool’s paradise I was living in, and a rude awakening was in store for me. A week before the Old Factory was burnt down I received a second communication from America—this time in the shape of a letter from Stephen Fell. They had heard, he wrote, he and his sister, that I was either married, or about to be married, to Miss Basel. I must remember, however, that Lydia was still my lawful wife, and that they could stop the marriage if they thought fit. Not that they desired to do so; far from it. They were comfortably settled, doing well, and had no wish to return to England. If I were willing to pay Lydia ten thousand pounds she would remain where she was, and enter into an engagement never to trouble me. If, on the other hand, they did not have a satisfactory answer in a reasonable time—say within three months of the date of the letter—Lydia would come over and claim me as her husband, and, if I were already married, prosecute me for bigamy. They did not demand the ten thousand pounds

all at once, Stephen was good enough to add. Lydia was willing to accept two thousand pounds down—the balance on my acceptances at three, six, and twelve months.

“If Lydia had appeared in person it could hardly have given me a greater shock than this letter gave me. It was like a bolt from the blue. All my happiness was gone in a moment. I fell into deeper despondency than that from which the news of her death had raised me. As for accepting Stephen’s offer, I never thought of it for a moment. I loved Valérie too well to marry her only in name ; and I hope I respected you too much to repay your kindness by so base a wrong. But how to act—what to do—was the pressing question. Valérie was of a nature so sensitive, she loved me so deeply, that I feared she would hardly survive the knowledge that I was the husband of another woman and might never be hers. As for myself, I felt that life without her would be so little worth having that I had serious thoughts of solving the difficulty by blowing out my brains. Then it occurred to me that the first story might be true—that Lydia

might be dead, after all. The letter was not written by her, and I knew that to get hold of ten thousand pounds, or even a much smaller sum, there was nothing short of murder that Stephen would stick at. If I could have contrived any plausible excuse, I would have gone to America at once and found out the truth for myself. I even thought of going secretly. My mind was in a whirl, and I conceived and rejected a new scheme almost every hour.

"This was the state of things when the fire took place, as I mentioned, a few days after the receipt of Stephen Fell's letter. I need not relate the history of the fire ; you are sure to know what happened."

"I was there," observed Basel ; "I came up just as you lowered Fair Alice from the window."

"Then you would see that, after the flames seized on the ladder, rendering escape that way impossible, I fell back from the window ?"

"We could not see anything distinctly—the view was obscured by smoke ; but that was certainly our impression."

“ Well, I did fall back, and, in order to get as far away from the smoke as possible, I ran to the other end of the room. I knew that a horrible death stared me in the face—that hardly anything short of a miracle could save me; yet somehow the very extremity of the peril seemed to sharpen my faculties and increase my presence of mind.

“ In the part of the room to which I ran was a hoist—used for bringing up bobbins from the cardroom in the bottom storey—or, rather, a hole in the floor through which the box containing the bobbins went up and down. As it happened, the box was below. Without a moment’s hesitation I grasped the hoist-ropes and let myself down, hand under hand. The next room was all in a blaze, and in going through it I ran the risk of being either stifled or burnt. However, I managed to reach the lowest storey without much damage.

“ By this time it also was burning. Part of the ceiling had fallen in, and every way of egress was closed.

“ I was hemmed in between a blank wall and

a mass of moving fire. The flames crept over the floor; they leaped from one carding engine to another; they curled round the steam-pipes. The heat became almost insupportable; the place was full of smoke. I thought my last hour was come, and, more in desperation than in the hope of prolonging my life by getting a breath of pure air, I threw myself on the floor. As I fell, my hand struck against an iron ring fastened in a flag; and then I remembered that, underneath the floor, and right through the foundations of the Old Factory, ran the culvert—a vaulted passage—which conducted the waste water from the big wheel race to Moorwell Brook. The flag covered the entrance to a manhole opening into the culvert.

“The next moment I was on my feet, tugging at the ring with all the energy of despair.

“But the flag had not been moved for years, and, tug as I would, it refused to yield. I rushed, heedless of the smoke and heat, to the nearest drawing frame, tore away one of the rods, and used it as a lever. It broke in my

hand, yet not before I had stirred the flag so that, by exerting all my strength, I succeeded in moving it from the orifice. I then threw down the hole a bag of sweepings which chanced to be by—for a fall on the paved bottom of the culvert might have broken my limbs—and, with a muttered prayer, dropped down into the darkness.

“I fell on the bag of sweepings, which probably saved my life. Five minutes later, as I lay there, partially stunned and utterly exhausted, I heard a great crash. It was the roof of the Old Factory falling in.”

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTERTHOUGHTS.

“FOR an hour or more,” Frank went on, “I could not move, probably from the effects of the smoke; for towards the last I had been nearly suffocated. But I could think, and my thoughts naturally went back to Lydia Fell and the terrible difficulty in which Stephen’s letter had placed me. Why should I not, I asked myself, after a long cogitation—why should I not make use of the present opportunity to carry out my idea of going to America—go there without letting it be known that I had escaped from the fire? It would be believed by this time that I had perished, the first bitterness of the shock would be over, and the unhappiness resulting from my supposed death could hardly be greater than the

unhappiness that would be caused by the revelation of my marriage with Lydia. If I found that Lydia was dead I could come back, make a frank explanation of my motives, and trust to your friendship and Valérie's love for forgiveness. If she were still alive I would remain away for ever. I would be as one dead. For, rightly or wrongly, it seemed to me then that it were better almost to die than be tied all my life to Lydia. It was a desperate expedient, but I was in desperate straits; and before I began to grope my way out of the culvert I had resolved to carry it out and laid my plans.

"I anticipated little or no difficulty in getting away unperceived. It was considerably after sunset, and as my clothes were torn, my face blackened, and I had no hat, it was little likely that I should be recognised. Anybody that chanced to meet me would take me for a man who had been helping to put out the fire.

"When I reached the outlet of the culvert, which, owing to the water-wheel being stopped, was almost dry, I looked carefully round, and, seeing nobody about, I waded over Moorwell

Brook, and struck across the fields in the direction of Black Dyke, which, as I daresay you know, is at the far end of the Brandwood property, and some six miles from Moorwell. I could not well carry out my plan without help, and my object in going thither was to see a gipsy woman, of the name of Myra Lee, who was under a slight obligation to me for having prevailed on my father to let her and her people stay at Black Dyke after he had ordered them to quit. She professed great gratitude at the time, and said that, after what I had done for them, the gipsies would go through fire and water for me. I had almost forgotten the incident, but it seemed to me now that as I was almost forced to trust somebody, the best thing I could do was to go to the encampment and ask Myra to assist me in getting unobserved out of the country.

“It was late when I reached Black Dyke, and I had to rouse Myra from her sleep, or rather the dogs which guarded the tents made such a noise at my approach as to rouse the entire encampment. When old Mother Lee appeared I told her what I wanted of her, and

in doing so I was necessarily compelled to take her, under a strict pledge of secrecy, a good deal into my confidence. I did not, however, trust altogether to promises. I made her understand that it would be worth her while, in more ways than one, to do my bidding and keep my secret. She agreed to everything I proposed, and before I laid down on a truss of straw in one of the covered carts all our arrangements were made.

“At daybreak next morning I donned a suit of gipsy clothes, stained my face and hands to the gipsy tint, with a decoction prepared by Mother Lee, and set out, accompanied by one of her young men, for Liverpool. We followed by-paths and unfrequented roads, carefully avoiding places where I should run any risk of being recognised. On the evening of the second day we reached the great seaport. We passed the night in a small inn in the outskirts of the town, where my companion was known. The next day I bought a portmanteau, laid in a stock of clothing, and bespoke a passage in a ship appointed to sail within the next twenty-four hours.”

"How did you manage that?" asked Basel.
"Where did the money come from?"

"Oh, I was pretty well provided in that respect. A waste dealer paid me an account—very nearly three hundred pounds, I think it was—only an hour or two before the fire, and I had the amount in my pocket, mostly in bank notes. Then I had my diamond ring and watch, worth between them at least two hundred more."

"And you took your passage, you were saying?"

"Yes, I took my passage and dismissed my companion, and the ship—the *Maiden Queen* she was called—dropped down the river only two days after the time fixed for her sailing. Nothing worth telling happened in the early part of the voyage. Until we were halfway across the Atlantic we had calm seas and cloudless skies, and every day was exactly like its predecessor. But after that the weather became frightful. One storm followed another. Sails were blown away. Once the vessel got on her beam-ends, and before she could be

righted the fore and main masts had to be cut away. Then the rudder top broke, and for several days the wreck was at the mercy of the winds and waves. We were blown and drifted hundreds of miles out of our course. Fortunately the ship was staunch, and the captain a first-rate seaman, or we should assuredly have gone to the bottom. As it was we had all, both passengers and crew, to be put on short allowance. After knocking about the Atlantic for weeks we finally reached the island of St. Thomas, in the West Indies, where we were almost as far from New York as we had been at Liverpool. As the *Maiden Queen* could not be refitted and made seaworthy under three or four weeks, the captain advised me to go on to New Orleans by a vessel that was just on the point of leaving for that port. I could easily, he said, get from New Orleans to New York. I acted on this advice without hesitation, and after a stay at St. Thomas of little more than two days, I was on my way to the Gulf of Mexico.

“ We made a quick passage. It might have

been a pleasant one, if I could have forgotten. But I could not. I had always before me two sad and reproachful, yet forgiving, faces—my mother's and Valérie's. The two beings in all the world I most loved I had plunged into the bitterest grief. I knew they were sorrowing for me as those sorrow who are without hope, and my heart was very heavy, Mr. Basel. I began to have serious doubts as to the expediency of the course I had adopted. A proceeding which caused so much pain to all who loved me would be hard to justify. Then I felt so lonely, so utterly bereft of sympathy, so entirely cut off from all companionship. I could speak to nobody of my past. My future was dark and uncertain. I was a waif, a homeless, nameless wanderer, whom men thought dead, and to those I cared for, if I carried out my plan, I might always remain dead. But my resolution not to return to England in the event of Lydia Fell being alive was beginning to be seriously shaken. The more I thought of it the more impossible did it seem for me, if I lived, never to look on Valérie's face again, never again to see my

mother or my father, who, in spite of the sternness of his character, had latterly treated me not unkindly.

“At New Orleans another misfortune befell me. The day after my arrival, just as I was preparing to start for New York, I was struck down by yellow fever, which laid me up for a long time. Though unaware of it myself—for after the first attack I lapsed into a state of semi-unconsciousness—I believe I very nearly went under. The doctor, as he told me afterwards, at one time gave me up altogether. However, he managed to pull me through, and as soon as I was fit for travel I made my way first to New York, and then to Albany, where, without of course disclosing my real name, I made inquiry about the Fells. I had no need to disguise myself. I am yellow now, I was the colour of a guinea then. I had let my hair and beard grow long, and my own mother, let alone Lydia or Stephen, would not have known me. What the latter had told me in his letter was so far true that they were comfortably settled and believed to be doing well. Lydia

was not dead. There had been an accident like that mentioned in the *Albany Tomahawk*, and she was reported to be one of the victims, though, as it turned out, she was one of the rescued. As to this, then, Stephen had told no lie ; but he had carefully omitted to tell me that his sister was married, and the mother of a little boy. She was married shortly after the boat accident (which took place some time before we heard of it) to an individual of the name of Freebody, with whom Stephen was in partnership in a commission business. This was startling news ; but what startled me more—alarmed me even—was to hear that both sister and brother were in England. Lydia had been gone several months, but Stephen had left only a few days before my arrival. I feared they were after no good, and resolved at once to follow them.

“After obtaining certified proof of Lydia’s marriage with Mr. Freebody I returned to New York, and took the first steamer for England. I landed in Liverpool last week, and saw there in one of the papers a mention of the approaching trial of Blackthorne *versus* Blackthorne.

Then I went to Manchester by railway, and came on here the day before yesterday by coach. Last night I spent an hour in the bar-parlour of The Bay Mare, where I thought I might hear what was going on without asking many questions. Nor was I disappointed. I think I learnt the main facts of the case of Blackthorne *versus* Blackthorne. Then I sent for you. I thought it would be well to keep my presence here as quiet as possible until after the trial, and for that reason I have as yet made myself known only to you. But as to this and my proceedings generally I need hardly say, Mr. Basel, that I am willing—nay, more than willing, anxious—to be guided by your advice.”

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE KING'S ARMS.

BASEL was unfeignedly glad to find that Frank had not perished in the Old Factory fire, as all had believed. Being, moreover, a tolerant, generous-minded man, he was not given to impute evil motives, preferring rather to judge others, if he judged them at all, leniently, and put the most charitable construction on their doings. Hence, albeit there was much in Frank's conduct of which he could not approve, he spoke no words of blame. Except when he was very angry, he found it difficult to censure even his own workmen; and Frank's appearance just then would have softened the heart of a much harder man than Hermann Basel. His body was gaunt, his skin yellow, his cheeks were drawn, his eyes hollow, and their lids dark.

When he spoke his voice trembled, and his whole manner and bearing betokened impaired health, severe nervous prostration, and deep mental distress..

“Well, I am heartily glad you are risen from the dead, dear boy, though you did give me such a terrible shock,” said Basel cheerfully, after a short pause. “I am glad for all our sakes—you were always one of my favourites you know—but especially for the sake of your father and mother and poor Valérie; for I am sure she would rather you were alive than dead, even if it should turn out, after all, that you are Lydia Fell’s husband. As for your conduct generally, we had better, I think, leave that for discussion another day. I must have time for further consideration before I deliver my verdict. I will, however, say this—if you had not gone away as you did after the fire we might not have discovered the flaw in this unfortunate marriage of yours.”

“About the name, you mean?”

“Exactly.”

“That is not the only flaw.”

"Indeed! What is the other?"

"Lydia's marriage with Freebody. I consulted a solicitor as I came through Liverpool, and this, he assured me, would be sufficient to procure a decree of separation from the Court of Arches, and afterwards a divorce from the House of Lords—by Act of Parliament, you know."

"Then you have two strings to your bow. Failing the flaw, you can fall back on the divorce. But the name is the best—getting a divorce would be a very tedious business. You said just now that Lydia knew your right name at the time you were married—went through the form of marriage, rather. How can this be proved?"

"By herself, by her own handwriting."

"You have letters, then?"

"I have nothing; but more conclusive proof than any likely to be contained in letters exists, and can easily be procured."

"In what shape?"

"In the shape of a transfer of railway scrip. I used to dabble a little in shares, you know. Well, a month or two before I committed the

folly of marrying Lydia, I received some transfers of Leeds and Manchester stock to sign. They had to be returned the same evening. As it fell out, I went that day to dine with Stephen and Lydia. My father was not at home. After dinner I mentioned having some transfers to sign, and asked Stephen to remind me of them when we got back to the counting-house, so that the matter might not be forgotten.

“‘Nothing like time present,’ said Stephen; ‘sign them now. I daresay Lydia will witness them for you.’

“Then I had to explain to Lydia what a transfer was, and, as the suggestion seemed to please her, I signed the three documents in her presence as ‘Francis Adam Blackthorne,’ and she witnessed them every one.”

“Capital. And where can we find these transfers?”

“In the offices of the railway company at Manchester. I am sure, the business being explained to him, the secretary will let us have the transfers for a few days, against your or my father’s undertaking to return them.”

"Well, I will tell you what I will do, Frank. I will go to Manchester to-morrow, get these transfers, if they are to be got; see Kean, the lawyer who has charge of the suit, you know, tell him of your resurrection and return, and ask him what is best to be done in the altered circumstances of the case. I shall return here to-morrow night, and tell you how I have sped. If I am prevented from coming I will send you word. Meanwhile, I shall tell nobody else, not even your father, of your reappearance; and you will, of course, maintain your incognito."

Frank expressed his approval of these proposals, and gave his friend all the particulars he could remember concerning the three railway transfers.

"I shall tell Mrs. Broadbeam you are an old acquaintance of mine," observed Basel, as he rose to go, "just by way of allaying her curiosity, you know. But what name shall I say?"

"John Robinson is the name I gave last night at The Bay Mare."

"Good. Mr. Robinson let it be then. And now, friend Frank, I must say *Auf wiedersehen*."

"Just one question more, before you go," said Frank timidly. "Is Valérie at home?"

"No. She is at Laytham with your mother. We thought they were better out of the way until the trial is over, of which, as I told you, Valérie knows nothing. Your mother and she have taken very much to each other since Fritz and Mabel were married."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Frank, "are Fritz and Mabel married?"

"That they are," laughed Basel; "and, what is more, your sister has just made Fritz the father of a bouncing boy, who has to be called 'Francis Adam Blackthorne.'"

He did not tell Frank that Mabel and Fritz were living in the house which had been built for Valérie and himself.

Late on the following evening, Basel, in fulfilment of his promise, came a second time to The Bull's Head. He had succeeded in getting possession of the three transfers which, as Frank had said, bore his signature in full, attested by

Lydia Fell. But he had not seen Kean. The lawyer had left that very morning for Lancaster. He would stay all night in Preston, and arrive, his clerk thought, in the county town on Saturday evening, so as to have an opportunity of conferring with counsel on Sunday, and be in readiness for the opening of the Assizes on the following day.

"That is very unfortunate, is it not?" said Frank, when he heard the news. "What do you propose to do now?"

"Well, we must see Kean, and the sooner the better. It is of the utmost importance that he should know of your reappearance on the scene and the finding of the transfers. What I propose to do is this: You remain here to-morrow—although I daresay you are growing rather weary of Redburn and The Bull's Head—as you have done to-day. On Sunday morning at eight o'clock I shall call for you here; we will drive to Preston in my carriage, and post thence to Lancaster. We shall get there before one o'clock, and can, if necessary, have all the afternoon with Kean. What do you say?"

"I am quite agreeable to do whatever you think best, and I do not think I can suggest any improvement on your plan. As you say, it is slow work staying here, but (smiling) I have undergone many worse hardships than a dull day at Redburn since the Old Factory fire, Mr. Basel."

This programme was carried out to the letter. At one o'clock on the Sunday afternoon Basel and Frank arrived at the King's Arms Hotel, Lancaster, where Kean was staying, and where they also proposed to put up.

After taking some refreshment, Basel sent his card to the lawyer's room, and received, in reply, a message to the effect that Mr. Kean would be glad to see him at once.

"Shall I go with you?" asked Frank.

"By all means; you are indispensable; but I shall not tell Kean in the first instance who you are."

"Good-morning, Mr. Basel. How do you do?" said the lawyer, as the two men entered his room, which was almost as much littered with papers as his office in Manchester. "I

hardly expected to see anybody from Moorwell to-day. Pray take a seat. I hope you bring good news."

"I think so. Look at these papers (handing him the transfers), and tell me if they have not an important bearing on the case. We are entirely indebted to this gentleman (pointing to Frank) for their discovery."

The lawyer bowed, took the documents, and glanced them hastily over.

"Transfer of fifty shares Leeds and Manchester stock from Francis Adam Blackthorne to Jabez Johnstone. 'Signed by the aforesaid Francis Adam Blackthorne, in the presence of Lydia Fell.' By Jove (striking his fist on the table), this is exactly what we want. These transfers will win us the case. How did you come by them, Mr. Basel?"

"As I just now told you, by the help of this gentleman."

"I am sure we are all greatly obliged to him," said Kean, with a polite bow to Frank; "but I do not remember—I am afraid I have not the honour of knowing him."

"He is, nevertheless, deeply interested in the case," observed Basel. "More than anybody else, I may say."

"More than Mr. Blackthorne?"

"More even than Mr. Blackthorne, for he is Mr. Blackthorne's son."

"Indeed, I was not aware Mr. Blackthorne had a second son."

"Nor has he; this is his only son and heir."

"Are you serious, Mr. Basel?" said Kean, with a puzzled look. "Why, this son you speak of is dead; he was burnt alive."

"He was supposed to be, but he has come to life again, or rather he never died."

And then Basel briefly related the main facts connected with Frank's disappearance and re-appearance.

"What an extraordinary story!" exclaimed Kean, when Basel had finished his narrative. "I never heard such a thing in all my life—never met with anything like it in all my experience."

And then the lawyer leaned back in his chair with a sigh, the look of astonishment

which his face had just worn giving place to one of mingled disappointment and disgust,—like that of a lover whose sweetheart fails in her tryst, of an author whose manuscript is returned by a hard-hearted publisher, or of a Manchester calico printer when requested to step over to a customer's warehouse “to look at a lot of jobs.”

“What is the matter?” said Mr. Basel, alarmed at this portentous symptom.

“Matter!” rejoined the lawyer. “Why, don’t you see?—the game is up. We shall have no trial now.”

“But why not?” exclaimed Basel, more alarmed than ever. “I thought these transfers—and Lydia Fell’s signature and all—made us cocksure of winning.”

“So they would, my dear sir, if there was anything to win. But since this gentleman has thought fit to return to life there are no longer any grounds for a trial—there is nothing to try. The issue set down for trial is really whether Lydia Fell is Francis Adam Blackthorne’s widow or not. But if he is not dead, it is quite clear

she cannot be his widow, and her claim on the estate vanishes into thin air. Don't you perceive?"

"Yes, I perceive," answered Basel, albeit he still looked somewhat puzzled. "But in that case is Lydia Frank's wife or not? That is what we want to get at, is it not, Frank?"

"It is everything for me," replied Frank, in a despondent voice. "I thought Mr. Kean said those transfers——"

"Stay," interrupted the lawyer, drawing himself up in his chair, and speaking with all his wonted vivacity. "I have an idea. You would like to have this marriage pronounced—authoritatively pronounced, I mean—null and void, would you not?"

Basel and Frank responded eagerly in the affirmative.

"Until it is, you know, there will always be a doubt. In the face of those documents I have no hesitation in saying the marriage is void. It is impossible that a judge and a jury should take any other view of the case; and a verdict for the defendant in this suit of *Blackthorne versus*

Blackthorne would settle the matter once for all. And I really think, after all, the trial might be allowed to go on. The Court of Chancery, at whose instance these proceedings are being taken, knows nothing of Mr. Frank Blackthorne's return, and, in point of fact, neither do I. You, Mr. Basel, may believe that this gentleman is Mr. Blackthorne's son; but your belief may not be my belief, and I am bound to say that, until he has been recognised and acknowledged by his family, I cannot share in your belief. You may be mistaken, you know."

"Of course I may," said Basel, with a smile; "and I think you are quite right in suspending your judgment until you have had an opportunity of consulting Mr. Blackthorne. By all means let the trial go on. I believe I did not tell you that Fr——, that this gentleman's name—his travelling name, I should say—is Robinson. Allow me to introduce you to each other—Mr. Kean, Mr. Robinson; Mr. Robinson, Mr. Kean."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr.

Robinson," said the lawyer. "You have done us an inestimable service in bringing under our notice these railway transfers, a service for which we cannot be sufficiently grateful. You will remain here until the trial is over, I suppose, Mr. Robinson?"

"I came here with that intention," said Frank gravely.

"Glad to hear it. I hope to have the opportunity of making your better acquaintance. You will, of course (addressing Basel), say nothing of this to Mr. Blackthorne, until after the trial. What has passed here among us three is, for the present at least, a profound secret."

"Certainly," said Basel.

"Certainly," repeated Frank.

"And now, gentlemen," the lawyer went on, looking at his watch, "I am afraid I must terminate our interview, but the fact is I have an appointment in three minutes with Serjeant Pumpendry, and he is the most punctual of men. If you are not otherwise engaged, will you do me the honour to dine with me this

evening, here, in this room, at half-past six?—if that time would be convenient.”

The invitation was cordially accepted, and the two friends withdrew.

“Capital,” said Kean, rubbing his hands briskly together as the door closed behind the visitors. “I am glad that idea occurred to me. Mr. John Robinson—ah, ah! Gad, when I come to think of it, he does look very like a resuscitated corpse. To have missed such a beautiful trial would have been nothing less than a calamity. It will be a leading case, and give us a capital advertisement—to say nothing of the nice addition it will make to my bill of costs. I have had nothing so good for a long time. Miss coming off! Not if I know it.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIAL.

THE cause list was not heavy. A considerable amount of business was got through on the Monday and Tuesday, and on the evening of the latter day Kean informed Basel and Adam (who had arrived on the previous afternoon) that the special jury cases would begin on Wednesday, and that the first down for trial was that of Blackthorne against Blackthorne. Later in the evening Basel communicated this news to Frank, who, in anticipation of his father's arrival, had left The King's Arms for another lodging. It was hardly possible that Adam would have penetrated his son's disguise, but Kean thought it better to avoid all chance of such a contingency by keeping them apart.

There was no reason, however, why Frank should not be present at the trial, and entering the court-house shortly after the judge had mounted his dais, he took a seat among the spectators. His father, Basel, and Kean were already there. They had been accommodated with seats behind the bar, as had also Lydia and her brother, so that the parties to the suit and their legal champions were almost within earshot of each other.

The plaintiff's case was opened by Serjeant Buster, a pudgy little man, with small dark eyes, very black eyebrows, a coarse red face, and a huge mouth, but possessed of a voice at once sonorous and flexible, and gifted with marvellous readiness of speech. After explaining very fairly and clearly the legal bearings of the case—how it had originated in the Palatinate Court of Chancery, and had been sent down for trial at the present Assizes, and the issues to be tried, he proceeded to tell, in florid and picturesque language, of the loves of Lydia and Frank. He described Lydia as a young, beautiful, lovely, and accomplished woman, who had seen better days,

and been forced by stress of fortune to earn her living by plying her needle. He spoke of her brother in terms hardly less laudatory : as a fine fellow who had never failed in affection for his parents, in devotion to his sister, or in his duty to his employers. His conduct, in short, had been exemplary in every relation of life, and his character was little less than perfect. The learned serjeant next described their meeting with the elder Blackthorne, their engagement, the one as bookkeeper, the other as lady housekeeper (he laid particular emphasis on the " lady"), and their removal to Moorwell. Then Frank was brought on the scene. If Buster's sketch of the brother and sister had been glowing, his portrayal of Lydia's lover was nothing less than gushing. As for his physical endowments, he was tall, stalwart, and handsome ; as touching his moral and mental qualities, he was high-principled, pure-minded, and sublimely disinterested. And though a ripe scholar and a master of many languages, he was an energetic and successful man of business, and positively adored by his workpeople.

As Frank listened to this enumeration of his virtues he shifted uneasily in his seat, and his face became so red that Basel, who happened to look round at the same moment, was surprised and almost alarmed to observe how like he was to his old self.

Then Serjeant Buster, in language equally brilliant, adorned with many poetic quotations, told how this noble youth and maiden met and loved; how their love grew day by day until Frank, unable longer to conceal the passion that consumed him, and listening only to the promptings of his heart, avowed his attachment, and demanded Lydia's hand in marriage, and she, feeling herself not unworthy to become his wife, accepted his offer. But the lovers had to reckon with a formidable obstacle to the consummation of their hopes—a hard-hearted father. And then Buster went on to sketch Adam Blackthorne's character and conduct in terms so little flattering, that the object of his censures restrained himself with difficulty from reaching over and knocking his calumniator's wig off. The serjeant described him as purse-

proud, arrogant, and ambitious ; as a tyrannical father, and an exacting master, and as despising the class from which he had sprung. He had begun life as a farmer's boy, yet thought a farmer's daughter not good enough to mate with his son.

After casting unmeasured opprobrium on the defendant, and prejudicing him to the utmost possible extent in the minds of the jury, the eloquent advocate related how, for fear of the opposition of this cruel father, the young people were constrained to contract a secret marriage at the Collegiate Church of Manchester. It was in every respect a legal marriage, said the serjeant, and he would prove beyond a shadow of doubt that, at the time it was solemnised, his client had not the most remote idea that her husband possessed any other name than Frank. He ascribed Lydia's departure for America to her romantic devotion to her husband, and her desire to shield him from the anger of his father, who, having accidentally discovered their attachment—albeit he did not know of their marriage—had threatened, if the Fells did not leave Moorwell,

not alone to disinherit his son, but to turn him out of house and home. Then he drew a moving picture of the burning of the Old Factory, of the rescue of Fair Alice, of Frank's heroic death, of Lydia's unutterable grief and desolation when she knew that her young husband "had perished in his splendid adolescence," and concluded with a peroration that melted into tears all the ladies who heard it, and visibly and deeply affected every member of the jury.

"Exactly what I expected," whispered Kean to Basel. "He has taken the jury on their blind side. Without these transfers we should not have had a ghost of a chance."

The witnesses first examined were Mr. Harvey, the chaplain of the Collegiate Church, who had performed the ceremony, and Mark Binyon, who, together with Stephen Fell, had witnessed the marriage. Their evidence was very brief. They testified to the fact of the marriage described in the registry having taken place. They identified the *soi-disant* Lydia Blackthorne as the woman who was married to Frank Blackthorne; but whether Frank Blackthorne

and Francis Adam Blackthorne were one and the same person they were unable to say.

Stephen Fell was then called. He entered the witness-box with an air of great assurance, and was as cool and self-possessed throughout his examination, and answered Buster's questions and Pumpendry's cross-questions with as much readiness and assurance as if he had been supplied with copies of them beforehand, and rehearsed his part in private. He gave the same evidence about the marriage as the previous witnesses, with the addition of swearing to the identity of the Frank Blackthorne in question with Francis Adam, son of Adam Blackthorne, of Moorwell and Brandwood.

"Were you aware that his legal appellation was Francis Adam?" asked Serjeant Buster.

"I was."

"Why then did you permit him to marry your sister as Frank?"

"I did not know there was any wrong in it. Frank was the name he always went by, and it never occurred to me that it was not as good for the purpose as any other."

"I presume if you had thought that the use of young Mr. Blackthorne's colloquial name in place of his legal one might give rise to doubts as to the legality of the marriage, you would have insisted on his full name being used?"

"Certainly."

"Did your sister know his full name?"

"To the best of my belief she did not. I never told her, nor, so far as I am aware, did anybody else ever tell her."

When Buster had done with Stephen, Pumpendry took him in hand.

"Will you swear," he asked, "that your sister did not know that young Mr. Blackthorne was called Francis Adam?"

"How can I swear as to what another person knows? You had better put that question to my sister, Mr. Pumpendry."

"Who procured the licence?"

"I did."

"Now, did you not deliberately procure it in the name of Frank, with a view to conceal Mr. Blackthorne's identity, and throw possible inquirers off the scent?"

"No, I did not. It was pure inadvertence I tell you. If I erred at all it was from ignorance."

"In any case you connived at a clandestine marriage. Do you think you acted honourably, being at the time in Mr. Blackthorne's employment, in helping his son clandestinely to marry your sister?"

"Well, I see no dishonour in it. My sister was as good as him. He was my friend, and I helped him as I would have helped any other friend in the same circumstances. If old Mr. Blackthorne had not been the man he was it might have been different."

"What do you mean by that? Why was it right to deceive Mr. Blackthorne when it would have been wrong to deceive any other body?"

"Because he was so unreasonable and tyrannical."

"So you deceived Mr. Blackthorne because he was tyrannical. How was he tyrannical?"

"Why, he thinks nothing of kicking a man that does not please him downstairs, or throwing him into the lodge."

"Did you ever know him do any of those things?"

"No, but I have heard of him doing them."

"Why did you go to America?"

"Because Mr. Blackthorne sent us away from Moorwell."

"Any other reason?"

"Yes, he gave us—my sister, perhaps I ought to say—two thousand pounds to take ourselves away."

"Was there no other consideration for this two thousand pounds? It seems a large sum to pay for so little."

"Yes, my sister agreed to abandon all claim in respect of Mr. Frank's promises to her."

"Promises of marriage, I suppose you mean?"

"That is what I mean."

"Do you think that was very honest?"

"In which way?"

"Why, taking the two thousand pounds to compromise a supposed claim for breach of promise, when you knew, or believed, that your sister and young Mr. Blackthorne were already married?"

"Well, frankly, if you put it in that way, I do not. But you see, the old gentleman was so unreasonable, and two thousand pounds is a large sum, and——"

"You may step down," interrupted Pump-
emdry, sternly. "I have no further questions to ask you."

"Not a bad witness," whispered Kean to Basel; "though I am not quite sure that his evidence will go down well with the jury. That admission about the two thousand was damaging——just a little too brutally frank."

The next witness, and, as it proved, the last, was the plaintiff. Her widow's weeds, which she still wore, became her well. Her fair eyebrows and lashes were in keeping with the snowy whiteness of her cap, and seemed to deepen by contrast the melancholy blackness of her crape. She looked pale, pretty, and interesting. As she stepped into the box a little thrill of excitement ran through the court, and all eyes were bent upon her, an ordeal which she sustained with a modest confidence, as if conscious of the justice of her cause.

Serjeant Buster conducted the examination-in-chief with great tact. He sank his sonorous voice to a soft whisper, took every occasion to address his witness ostentatiously as "Mrs. Blackthorne," with an air that seemed to imply supreme contempt for the theory that she had no right to the name, and he treated her with marked deference and respect.

After a few unimportant questions, relating principally to the fact of the marriage, he inquired if the witness knew at the time of the ceremony that her husband's name was other than Frank.

"Never," she replied, clasping her hands, a gesture which she accompanied with an upward glancing of her eyes, as if calling heaven to witness the truth of her denial. "Never, until the day before we left Moorwell, did I know that my dear husband had any other name than Frank."

When asked about her journey to America, she was so overcome by emotion that Buster had to wait a few minutes until she could recover herself. She had been prevailed upon

to leave England, she said, sorely against her wishes, by her brother's advice and the pressing entreaties of her dear husband. Had she insisted on remaining in England and avowing her marriage Frank would have been ruined; his father would have disowned and disinherited him. It was represented to her, moreover, that their separation would be only for a year or two—that so soon as Frank could reconcile his father to their marriage, or make himself pecuniarily independent of him, she should return and be openly acknowledged as his wife. As for the two thousand pounds, she took it not for herself, but for her brother, who, through his devotion to her interests, had lost his situation.

“Thank you, Mrs. Blackthorne,” said Serjeant Buster, when she had concluded her evidence, “that will do very well, I think. Perhaps my brother Pumpendry would now like to ask you a few questions, which I am sure you will answer with the same transparent candour that has characterised your replies to mine.”

"Yes," rejoined Serjeant Pumpemdry, a burly north countryman, with a shrewd face, and a strong border accent, "I think I would like to ask this lady a question or two. Now, madam (handing her the receipt for the two thousand pounds), will you be good enough to look at that and tell me if the signature there, 'Lydia Fell,' be in your handwriting?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is all in your handwriting, I think?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"When you wrote and signed that undertaking to leave England in consideration of a sum of two thousand pounds, you were already the wife, you say, of Francis Blackthorne?"

"I was."

"You signed a lie then, and obtained this money from Mr. Blackthorne under false pretences. I hope you are going to tell the truth now."

"This is a gross outrage," interrupted Serjeant Buster, with some heat. "What right have you to suggest that the witness will not tell the truth? I protest against the insinuation."

"Brother Pumpendry's observation was certainly just a little strong," remarked the judge. "Still you must remember that the witness admits having signed a document in a name not her own, for the purpose of obtaining a sum of money which, had the truth been known, would certainly not have been paid to her. It may not, therefore, be amiss to warn her to adhere strictly to the truth in the answers she is about to give. I think, however, the warning would have been none the less effective had it been a little less bluntly expressed."

This little episode over, Serjeant Pumpendry proceeded with his cross-examination.

"You said just now that you first became aware that your husband's name was Francis Adam on the eve of your departure for America. Under what circumstances did you arrive at this knowledge?"

"My brother drafted the agreement with Mr. Blackthorne, and I wrote it out fair. He told me then for the first time what my husband's name really was."

"Ah, that was the way, was it? Were you surprised?"

"Very much. It seemed so strange that I had never known it before."

"I quite agree with you; it was strange. Now, are you quite sure that you had never, before the time you speak of—when you were on the eve of sailing for America, you know—seen any other document in which your husband, as you call him, was described as 'Francis Adam'? No letter, envelope, or deed, for instance? Just try to recollect now."

"Never; I am quite sure that I never did," answered Lydia very positively.

"How were his letters generally addressed?"

"That I am unable to say. They never came to the house; they were always sent to the Old Factory."

"How did he sign his letters?"

"His letters to me were always signed 'Frank.' How those he sent to other people were signed I cannot tell you."

"So far as your knowledge goes, then, he

always wrote himself as 'Frank,' and 'Frank' only?"

"Always."

"Very good." (Here the serjeant paused to take a pinch of snuff.) "Now, will you kindly look at this paper, and tell me if this is not your signature?"

Here the serjeant showed her one of the transfers, the upper part of which, perhaps by accident, was doubled down. Lydia, who had probably forgotten having witnessed the signing of the transfer, and noticing only her own autograph, acknowledged without hesitation the signature to be hers.

"Yes," she said, "I believe that is my signature."

"And yet you say that at the time of your supposed marriage you were not aware that young Mr. Blackthorne had any other name than Frank?"

"No more I was."

"Wait until I have read the document to which your signature is appended, and then I will ask you again. It runs thus: 'I, Francis

Adam Blackthorne, in consideration of the sum of five hundred pounds paid by Jabez Johnstone, hereinafter called the said transferee, do hereby bargain, sell, and assign to the said transferee And the said transferee doth hereby agree to accept and take the said shares subject to the conditions aforesaid. As witness our hands this — day of —, one thousand eight hundred and forty —. Francis Adam Blackthorne. Signed, sealed, and delivered by the above-named Francis Adam Blackthorne, in the presence of Lydia Fell.’”

“What do you say now?” demanded the advocate sternly.

“I had forgotten all about those transfers—quite forgotten,” replied Lydia hardily, albeit she was evidently a good deal disturbed.

“That is very probable, I think. But do you admit that at the time of your marriage you knew your husband’s correct name? You see the date of this transfer precedes by a month the date of your marriage?”

“No, I do not.”

“How! You witnessed his signature three

times on the same day, and yet a month afterwards did not know Mr. Francis Blackthorne's name. Is that what you ask the court to believe?"

"I did not read the transfers. I did not look at them. Frank said: 'Put your name down here, Lydia,' and I put my name down there."

"You shut your eyes while he signed, I suppose, and then put your name down as having witnessed what you had never seen?"

"I did not know what it was about. I had forgotten all about it," said Lydia doggedly.

"So you forgot what you never knew. Very remarkable, I must say. I have done with you now, Mrs. Freebody; you may step down."

On hearing herself thus addressed, Lydia gave a little scream and turned very pale.

"You seem surprised," continued the serjeant. "You were probably not aware that I had here the certificate of your marriage with Jeremiah

Freebody, celebrated at Albany on—let me see——”

Here Serjeant Buster rose to protest. The document mentioned by Pumpemdry was not evidence. Reference to it was altogether irregular. He protested, too, against the share transfers being received as evidence. This led to a rather prolonged wrangle, the dispute being finally settled by the judge, who decided that the transfers were evidence, but that the marriage certificate was not.

On this Serjeant Pumpemdry announced that he was not going to call any more witnesses, and proceeded to address the jury. His speech was very short. He contended that his case was proved by Lydia Fell's evidence alone, whose name, he said, was neither Fell nor Blackthorne, but Freebody. If she knew that young Blackthorne's name was not Frank, but something else, then she was privy to a fraud, and her marriage with him was void. And that she did know was abundantly proved by the transfers; for it was an insult to the understanding of the jury to suppose that she could have witnessed

the three signatures of Francis Adam Blackthorne without seeing them. In short, the plaintiff's case had completely broken down, and he asked with the fullest confidence their verdict for his client.

The judge summed up almost in the same sense. If the jury believed, he said, that at the time of the marriage the plaintiff knew that the man to whom she was being married was wrongly described in the licence—that, in fact, he was not Frank Blackthorne at all, but Francis Adam Blackthorne—they would find for the defendant on the main issue. If, on the other hand, they considered, in spite of her admission of the genuineness of her signature as witness to the transfers, she did not know his name was other than Frank, they would give their verdict for the plaintiff.

After a short consultation the jury returned a verdict for the defendant on all the issues.

"If you like," said Kean to Adam, as they walked together to the outer gate of the Castle, "we will have these Fells arrested and prosecuted

for perjury; they richly deserve it. I rather fancy they are apprehensive of something of the sort, for I saw them slip quietly out of court just as Pumpendry began his speech."

"Nay, I think we had better not," replied Adam pensively; "it has not been a very creditable business to any of us, as far as I can see, and the sooner we let it drop the better. Let 'em go back to America. I don't suppose they'll ever trouble us again. They have had a lesson as they will not soon forget. And there's another I'd like to give a lesson to—that Serjeant Buster. Confound the fellow. If he ever comes near Moorwell I'll have him put in a sowlin (size) tub, wig and all."

"I don't think you are likely to catch him at Moorwell," said Kean, with a laugh. "He certainly was rather rough on you, but it was all in the way of business, you know. I have no doubt he has forgotten all about it by this time."

"Happen; but I haven't, and I don't think I ever shall."

Just then they were joined by Basel. Before

leaving the court-house he whispered to Frank that, if Kean saw no objection, he would break the news of his return to his father, and named a time for him to come to The King's Arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

KILLING THE FATTED CALF.

FRANK looked forward to seeing his father with considerable misgiving. He would much rather have first seen his mother, from whom he knew he might count on full forgiveness and a loving welcome. She would have smoothed the way for the interview. Her gentle influence might have mollified his father's anger, and been the means of sparing him the reproaches which, though he felt he had in a great measure deserved, he would have preferred to avoid.

But it was not now possible to defer the ordeal, and after stripping off his disguise, and making himself look as much like his old self as possible, he went to The King's Arms at the hour named by Basel. With a

full heart he knocked at the door of the latter's room.

"Come in," said a well-known voice.

He obeyed the summons and entered the room. His father was there alone, standing near the fireplace and looking eagerly towards the door.

"Oh Frank, my lad," he exclaimed, as he came forward to meet him, "how ill you look!"

Then Frank knew that there was neither anger to mollify nor reproach to fear.

Adam put his arms round his son's neck and regarded him with a look in which sadness and satisfaction seemed to be struggling for the mastery. Frank perceived that his father's eyes were filled with tears. He had never in all his life before seen him so deeply moved.

"Can you forgive me, father?" he said, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Forgive thee? I have not been thinking of that. Is it not enough that my son, as I thought was dead, is alive? If there is owt to forgive it is forgiven and forgotten from this

moment, my lad. And now that we have got rid of Lydia Fell I'd forgive anything. But I don't understand rightly how it has all come about. Since Basel told me you were not dead I have been that dazed as I feel almost as if I were in a dream. Come and sit down here, close to me, and tell me all about it."

Then Frank told his story a second time.

"You asked me a while since," said Adam, after the narrative was concluded, and several questions had been asked and answered, "if I could forgive you. I suppose you mean for marrying Lydia Fell and going away after the fire, so as we all thought you were dead?"

"Yes; I was very foolish, and——"

"Well, if there were nothing else," the father went on, "it would be hard to refuse forgiveness to my own lad as has suffered so much and been twice at the point of death. But that is not all. I am not free from blame myself. As Basel has just been saying, I did wrong in throwing you and those Fells so much together. It's nothing but what I might have expected.

And if that fellow Buster is right, I have a good deal more to answer for."

"You must not mind what he said, father. He talked to suit his own purpose."

"But other folks will mind if I don't. And I am not quite sure as there is not just a bit of truth in what he said. I happen have been too hard, though I am sure I have meant no ill."

"I am sure you have not, father, and the less you think of what Serjeant Buster said the better. But you do not say anything about my mother. When do you think I may see her?"

"Ay, poor Rachel; she will be right fain when she knows; so will Valérie. If you like we will go together to-morrow to Lytham and see them."

"If I like! Why, I would go to-night if it were possible."

"We could not well go to-night, and it would not be well if we could. We must contrive to warn them, or at any rate give them a hint beforehand, what to expect. Stay, I will drop a line to your mother by to-night's post."

So, pens and paper being on the table, a note

was there and then written to Rachel. It was very short, and ran thus :

“We have won. I am coming to-morrow, and will give you all particulars. I shall bring **SOMEBODY** with me that you little expect. Prepare for a **GREAT SURPRISE.**”

“There,” observed Adam, as he folded the letter, “she will show it to Valérie, and as Valérie has always believed you would come back, and has half-persuaded your mother to believe so too, they will be partly prepared for your coming ; but they will not be prepared for your **sallow skin and yellow eyes.**”

At this moment Basel entered the room.

“It is all right, Basel,” said Adam cheerily ; “we are going to Lytham to-morrow, Frank and me, and I have just written to Rachel to tell her to expect something extraordinary. We are not going by coach ; we shall take a post-chaise—I have a good deal to talk over with Frank—and you can go with us as far as Preston, you know.”

"Thank you, friend Blackthorne, it will give me much pleasure to have your company. By-the-bye, when do you propose to dine? I am beginning to feel very hungry."

"Soon ; and what is more, we'll have a right good dinner—as good as the house can give us. If you will just touch that bell there, we'll have the head-waiter or the landlord up, and give the order."

The head-waiter was summoned accordingly, and Adam gave his instructions. The viands were to be of the very best, and the wines the finest and oldest The King's Arms could produce. An ancient and very crusty port of a famous vintage was ordered for the special benefit of Frank, who seemed to be greatly lacking in strength, and whose general appearance, as his father remarked, suggested a want of reddening up. Adam had a profound belief in the restorative qualities and medicinal virtues of port-wine, and during the dinner he plied his son so assiduously with the "old crusty" that Frank had much ado to keep sober.

At Basel's suggestion Kean was invited to

dine with them, and altogether they had a very good time. The principal subject of conversation was, of course, the trial. The lawyer again expressed the opinion that, but for the production of the railway transfers, the Fells would have gained their case; and had not Frank returned, their next proceeding would have been to bring Mrs. Freebody's son from America, swear he was Frank's child, support the claim with forged documents, make him a ward in Chancery, and otherwise prepare the way for asserting his supposed rights under the Brandwood settlement.

"How would Mr. Freebody have gone on in that case?" asked Basel.

"Oh, Freebody would have been all right. Mr. Frank once dead, Lydia could of course marry again. They would have post-dated their marriage by a year, that's all.

"A risky game that, though."

"I suppose they thought it worth the candle. Anyhow, their first move came within an ace of succeeding; and to have won that would have been half the battle."

Before they separated for the night, every preparation was made for an early start the next morning.

Rachel, when she received her husband's note, acted precisely as he had anticipated. She showed it to Valérie.

"You know who it is," said the girl, as she looked at Rachel with flushed face and flashing eyes.

"You don't mean—it is impossible—it cannot be! And yet—and yet there is something that tells me. Oh Valérie! can it be true—can my boy be alive?"

"It is Frank that is coming. I am sure it is. Mr. Blackthorne would never write in this way if it were not. He says he is bringing somebody with him, and we are to prepare for a great surprise. It is Frank. Frank is alive. Frank's coming. Who else could he bring that would give us a great surprise? For the arrival of what other person would he think it necessary to prepare us?"

"God grant that you are right! Oh that

it may be true ! But it is impossible. How can it be true ? ”

“ How, I know not, but I am sure he is coming. ”

They passed the next few hours in a state of feverish suspense. They could neither eat nor rest, and their suspense was so great that they could hardly speak. They met the coach from Preston, and when they saw nobody alight from it whom they knew, they returned to their lodgings in bitter disappointment.

“ They are perhaps posting, ” murmured Valérie. “ I will look out of the window. ”

As for Rachel, her excitement and emotion were so great that she was obliged to lie down on the sofa.

An hour later a carriage with four horses was drawn up at the door.

“ They are come, ” said Valérie, rising from her chair.

“ Frank ? ” gasped Rachel.

Valérie nodded ; she was past speaking.

Then there were hurried footsteps on the

stairs, the door opened, and the next moment Valérie was clasped in her lover's arms.

He led her to the sofa where his mother, utterly unable to rise, still reclined. He kissed her, and, taking both her hands in his, asked her the same question he had asked his father—if she could forgive him.

“Oh Frank,” she exclaimed passionately, “why do you ask me such a question? Yes, a thousand times yes. I don't know why you went away. I don't know where you have been. I don't know what there is to forgive. But whatever it is, I forgive you, Frank, with all my heart. Am I not your mother? God has restored you to me. Is not that enough?”

“And to me,” murmured Valérie. “Oh Frank, who stole you from me? Where have you been this long weary time? They all said you were dead; but I knew you were not; I knew you would come back to us. How thin you are, and how ill you look! How you must have suffered, my poor Frank!”

And then Frank had to tell his tale a third time. He was treading on delicate ground, fo

Valérie as yet knew nothing of Lydia Fell, and Lydia was the alpha and omega of the story—his connection with her the head and front of his offending. When a man is defending his own cause in the hearing of the woman he loves, he would be either more or less than human were he not to do his utmost to put his conduct—if it should be open to two constructions—in the most favourable light. He touched as briefly as possible on his entanglement with the Fells, and his unfortunate marriage with Lydia. He allowed it to be inferred, rather than positively affirmed, that he was the innocent and unsuspecting victim of an odious plot; and so well did he plead his cause, that both Valérie and his mother firmly believed he had been inveigled into marrying Lydia almost without knowing it, as people in olden times are said to have been unwittingly entrapped into unhallowed compacts with the enemy of mankind. When he related his escape from the fire, Valérie's excitement was intense, and Rachel trembled and turned deadly pale. When he told of his illness and sufferings at New Orleans, and how narrowly he escaped death

a second time, they pitied him and wept ; and when he had wound up his narrative with an account of the trial at Lancaster, it would have been hard to say which of the two women was the more vehement in her denunciations of the Fells or showed the greater compassion for their victim.

"And you left England and crossed the Atlantic, and underwent all the troubles and hardships out of love for me, dear Frank," said Valérie softly. "If I had known the truth I could have borne your absence better. But you were quite right. You did well not to tell me ; for if I had known you were in the power of that wicked woman, that for anything you knew you were married to her, I do really believe I should have died or gone mad."

"That was it," rejoined Frank eagerly ; "that was why I went away."

Happy as Rachel was, she sighed. It is hard for a mother to conceive that she has only a second place in a child's love. Frank had left her without a word, had allowed her to believe

he had perished, in order to keep Valérie in ignorance of his marriage with Lydia Fell. It almost seemed as if, to save his mistress a pang, he was ready to break his mother's heart. And yet Frank did not think himself an undutiful or unloving son, nor did she think him one. If she had consulted Basel on the subject, he would probably have told her that, as love is the most engrossing of passions, so lovers are the most selfish of mankind. As it was, she consoled herself with mentally repeating the text: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh," and remembering that Frank and Valérie, in preferring each other to all the world, even to their own mothers, were only doing what their fathers and mothers had done before them, and what their children would do after them.

When the excitement caused by Frank's appearance and the telling of his story had sufficiently subsided to admit of some attention being given to the more humdrum matters, Adam mentioned that he had pressing business at Moorwell, and must leave them early on the

following morning ; but Kean being of opinion that his son's return had better not be made generally known for a few days, it might be well for Frank to remain at Lytham a week or so before presenting himself at Brandwood.

As may be supposed, this proposal was warmly welcomed by Frank, and, as Rachel and Valérie were delighted with the idea of having him all to themselves for a while, the proposed arrangement gave general satisfaction. They stayed at Lytham until the end of the following week, and then all returned home together.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTY.

"You may say what you like, Hermann; Frank Blackthorne has behaved very badly. I cannot pretend to forgive him, whatever you may do, and I will not give my consent to his marriage with Valérie. Did he not conceal his marriage with that Lydia Fell, and pay his court to Valérie, when, for aught he knew, he was that woman's husband? It is an insult to the whole family. You say he thought she was dead. I am not sure that he thought anything of the sort. A man who deceives his parents will deceive anybody. He is bad, thoroughly bad, that is my opinion, and no fit husband for a good girl like Valérie."

"You are altogether too uncharitable, my

dear. I know that in some respects Frank has behaved very badly ; nobody would admit it more freely than himself. But in some things he has acted well—nobly, one might say. A man who risks his life, as Frank did, to save a poor girl from a horrible death, cannot be wholly bad. And you should bear in mind that, when he had reason to suspect Lydia was still living, he did all he could—sacrificed himself, one may say—in order to find out the truth. I have never said so before—and I know there are two ways of regarding any subject—but I look upon his going to America after the fire as positively heroic. He preferred to efface himself, to abandon all rather than marry Valérie, so long as a doubt remained of his right to do so. If he had been the villain you make him out to be, he would have married her and said nothing, and bribed the Fells to say nothing.”

“As you say,” replied Mrs. Basel scornfully, “there are two ways of looking at his conduct. He ran away because he was afraid, that is my opinion ; afraid of the truth being known. Why, when he had reason to believe that woman

was still alive, did he not tell his father like a man, and go to America openly, and not sneak off like a coward?"

"You forget Valérie; it would have killed her."

"I doubt it. Girls are not so easily killed as some people think."

"At any rate the event proves him to have been right. It was well he did go. And before you blame him so severely, just think how young he was when that marriage took place—that he was simply victimised—more sinned against than sinning, any reasonable person would say."

"That means I am not a reasonable person, I suppose," said Mrs. Basel, with an angry toss of her head. "You can marry your daughter how you please, Hermann; you are the head of the family, you know. But I will not give my consent; I will not be present at the marriage; and if Frank Blackthorne comes here I will not speak to him."

This was not the first conversation of the sort that had taken place between Mr. and Mrs. Basel since the return of the former from

Lancaster; and do all that he could he had not been able to persuade his wife to let bygones be bygones, receive Frank into favour, and sanction his engagement with Valérie. The fact was, albeit she took care not to avow it, that his reappearance had caused her a bitter disappointment. She wished him no ill, but being away she would have been glad had he remained away. Fritz was her favourite child, and it had been a great gratification to her to think that Fritz and Mabel would be the inheritors of Adam Blackthorne's wealth, and their firstborn the heir of Brandwood. Frank's return had frustrated these hopes, and she felt as much annoyed as if he had done her a personal injury. Another grievance was, that when Valérie and Frank married—if they did marry—her son and his wife would have to leave the house in Brandwood Park, where they were now comfortably settled.

Mrs. Basel carried out the resolution she had announced to her husband. When Frank called at the Chalet the day after his return from Lytham, and they met in the hall, she cut him

dead. Greatly disconcerted at this unexpected reception, if reception it could be called, he turned to Valérie for an explanation. As she had shortly before had a long talk with her mother, in the course of which the latter had expressed her views about Frank with as little reserve as she had expressed them to her husband, Valérie had no difficulty in enlightening her lover as to the true state of the case, although, out of regard for his feelings, she spared him the most bitter of the bitter remarks Mrs. Basel had made about him.

"I am very sorry, Frank dear," said the girl apologetically. "I did all I could, and papa helped me, to persuade her to speak to you, if it were only a word. And that is not the worst. She has withdrawn her consent to our engagement, and says, if we are married, she will not be at the wedding. And she is my mother, you know. Oh Frank, I will never give you up; but I could not be married if mamma were not there. She has always been kind, you know—always until now—and papa thinks she will relent in a few days. She is never angry long.

We can wait, and you can come as usual, Frank dear. If she does not speak to you for a short time—for a week or two—you will not mind much. I know it is hard. It is hard for me too; but you will bear it for my sake, won't you, darling?"

"I will bear anything for your sake, my own Vaélie. Have you not borne a thousand times more for my sake? .Yes, we will wait until she is less angry, and more just. It cannot be long."

Frank was mistaken. They had much longer to wait than they thought for. A month passed, and Mrs. Basel was just as resolute as ever not to recognise him, nor to sanction his marriage with her daughter. At the end of the second month it was just the same. The more her husband and Valérie tried to reconcile her, the more submissive Frank showed himself, the more she seemed to harden her heart. It was bad for them all. Vaélie began to droop, Frank was wretched, Basel miserable. The latter, albeit far from being a weak man, was highly sensitive. He liked

above all things to have peace at home. When, as sometimes happened, his wife showed temper, he would withdraw quietly to his room, and read and smoke quietly by himself until the storm was overpast. A divided household, such as his had been since Frank's return, was simply intolerable to him, and he almost wished at times that Frank had carried out his intention of remaining away altogether.

One evening about this time, when Frank presented himself at the Châlet, and Mrs. Basel, as she had latterly been wont to do, left the drawing-room by one door as he entered it by another, Basel drew him aside.

"I cannot stand this sort of thing any longer, Frank," he said. "I will make a change. We are going abroad for a few months."

"Going abroad!" replied Frank, greatly surprised. "What good will that do? And the winter is far from being over yet. You will not find it pleasant travelling, I am afraid."

"I don't care for that. At any rate it will be pleasanter than living in this way. And Mrs. Basel likes the Continent. The mere

announcement of the intended trip will put her in a better humour. The bustle of travel, new scenes, and absence from home will give quite another turn to her thoughts. Our friends in France, with whom we shall spend a few weeks, will certainly not countenance her in this foolishness, and it may be well, too, to separate her for a while from Mabel."

"What on earth for?—what has Mabel done?"

"Oh blind young man, do you not see that by returning to life you have put Adam Blackthorne Basel's nose out of joint; and are you not aware that the little fellow is an immense favourite with his mother, and, if possible, a still greater one with his grandmother? And is it not more than probable that the two often talk the matter over, and are quite agreed that it is a very hard case for the deposed heir of Brandwood?"

"God bless me! and do you really think that Mrs. Basel's opposition arises from motives so unworthy? I certainly never looked at the matter in that light before; and yet, when I think of it, Mabel's manner is far from being

what it used to be—less sisterly and more reserved; but I attributed the peculiarity to her marriage and her absorption in her matronly duties.”

“The best of us is apt to be influenced by unworthy motives,” replied Basel dryly, “often, too, without knowing it. There are unknown lights and shades in the character of everyone. We all develop as we grow older—either develop or deteriorate. You think Valérie an angel now. How do you know that in twenty years hence she may not be a shrew and you a henpecked husband or domestic tyrant?”

“Heaven forbid!” exclaimed Frank.

“Well, I do not think such a consummation is likely,” rejoined Basel, with a smile. “But everything is possible. If it be true that few people know themselves, how much fewer must those be who know what they will become? Talking of development, have you noticed how greatly your father has changed of late? He is not like the same man. Your disappearance and supposed death, and, above all, your so unexpected return, made a profound impression on

him, and that speech of Serjeant Buster's, unjust and exaggerated as it was, opened his eyes as nothing else could have done."

"Yes, my father is much more genial and yielding than he used to be. Still, I think, if he were to come across the serjeant in a convenient place, it would be a bad job for the lawyer. You know, I suppose, how anxious my father is for Valérie and me to be married?"

"Yes, he was speaking to me about it the other day. But it cannot be just yet. You know what importance French-bred people attach to their parents' consent in these matters, and it would break Valérie's heart, I think, to be married without her mother's blessing. You must possess your soul in patience a little while longer, my boy. It will be all right in the end, you'll see. You and Valérie will correspond, of course, and so soon as Mrs. Basel is in a more placable mood I shall not fail to let you know."

"How long do you suppose you will be away?"

"That depends altogether on circumstances.

Three or four months probably. I daresay we shall return in the spring or summer."

What could Frank say? The indefinite postponement of his marriage, and the prospect of a six months' separation from Valérie—for he foresaw that it might be so long—were far from pleasing to him; yet he had to remember that the trouble was of his own making, and that Mrs. Basel, whatever might be her motives, was quite within her right in withholding her sanction from the engagement and refusing to be present at the wedding. There was nothing for it but, as Basel said, to possess his soul in patience, and acquiesce as cheerfully in the proposed arrangement as he might. He accompanied the travellers to Manchester, and bade a sorrowful farewell to Valérie at the station; but Mrs. Basel, obdurate to the last, did not acknowledge his presence by so much as a glance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE BANKS OF LAKE LEMAN.

AFTER lingering awhile in Paris, whither they journeyed by easy stages, the Basels went on to the east of France, made there a stay of some weeks with Mrs. Basel's relatives, and then proceeded to Zurich, on a visit to her husband's kinsfolk. From Zurich they travelled by Thun, Interlaken, Lucerne, and Lausanne, to Geneva; and the spring being by this time well advanced, Mr. Basel took a villa on the bank of the lake, about two miles north of the city.

It was a delightful spot. The house was situated on the brow of a gentle acclivity. In front of it ran a long wide verandah, its red granite pillars festooned with trailing rose-trees and the climbing clematis. A flight of broad

steps led to the garden, which sloped down to the water's edge. The walks were bordered with acacia trees ; the vines were in full leaf, the fruit-trees bursting into bloom. The flower-beds were gay with the graceful anemone and the beautiful blue scilla. The miniature grass-plot was gemmed with violets, primroses, and marguerites. And under the shadow of a magnificent lilac tree, whose fragrance filled the air, a fountain sprang from a marble basin, in which water-lilies floated. The garden terminated in a vine-covered terrace, bounded by a low ivy-mantled wall. At one end of the terrace the branches of a gigantic chestnut tree in full bloom, stooping over the wall, kissed the blue waters of the lake ; at the other rose a rustic bower, begirt with woodbine and eglantine.

In this bower, on an evening in May, sat Valérie Basel. Not a zephyr ruffled the emerald surface of the lake. The gentle hills of Faucigny were bright with verdure, while far away to the south-east towered the dazzling summits of the Pennine Alps. A veil of fleecy cloud hung about the flanks of Mont Blanc, but the im-

posing mass of the Col du Dromédaire, white with the gathered winter of a thousand years, loomed large in the darkening sky. As the sun sank behind the forest-crowned and empurpled Jura the mountain-top grew blood-red, the fleecy clouds became suffused with crimson, and the rocky gorges and rugged peaks of the Valley of Sixt glowed as if lit up by volcanic fires. Then, as the sun went lower, the erst-while rose-tinted snows took the hue of death, Mont Blanc showed huge and pallid like a shrouded giant on his bier, the ruddy glare of the rocks faded into utter gloom, and night hid the scene from view.

A few minutes later a red streak appeared in the sky over the Môle, and a crescent moon, floating from behind the mountain, cast her yellow beams across the lake, and bathed in golden light the bower in which Valérie, with clasped hands and uplifted head, sat like one entranced.

"Oh," she murmured, "how beautiful God has made everything in this glorious land! How I wish Frank were here to enjoy it with me!"

"Valérie," exclaimed a voice, as if in answer to her thought, and turning her head she saw a shadowy form at the entrance of the bower.

"It is—no, it cannot be—yes, it is—it is—it is——"

"Yes, Valérie, it is I—Frank," said her lover softly, as he folded her in his arms.

"But where have you sprung from—how have you come? I heard nothing. How strange that you should appear just when I was thinking about you, and wishing so much you were with me."

"I came in answer to your thoughts. You wished to see me, and I appeared."

"Ah Frank, if you were always where I wished you to be you would never be away from me. But, tell me the sober truth—how did you come?"

"From Moorwell I have come by railroad and steamship. I arrived at Geneva a little more than an hour ago, and have come hither in a small boat. As the moon lit up the bower I saw in it a form I thought I knew. When I heard the sweetest voice in all the world murmur

my name my surmise became a certainty, and I uttered aloud the word which is ever present in my thoughts, and which I do not forget even in my dreams—Valérie.”

“Dear Frank!” said the girl softly, as she laid her head on his shoulder and looked lovingly into his eyes. “But why, when you last wrote, did you not tell me you were coming?”

“Because, until six days ago, I had no idea of coming, and I left so suddenly, and have travelled so swiftly, that I must have outstripped the post by at least twelve hours. I had a letter from your father. Did he not tell you?”

“No; what was it about?”

“Then he wanted to surprise you. He left it to me—dear good man that he is!—to tell you the news—to tell you that your mother has received me once more into favour, agreed to sanction our engagement, and be present at our marriage. In two hours after I received that letter I was on my way to Geneva.”

“I thought so. I thought mamma was relenting. She has been so much kinder lately—so much more like her old self. But she never

mentioned your name, neither did we ; papa and I had agreed that we would not. He thought it was the best way of bringing her round, as he said. How good it was of you, Frank, to come so soon, and how very very tired you must be ! ”

Frank declared he was never less tired in his life, and proved the truth of his assertion in a most loverlike fashion.

“ Listen ! ” exclaimed Valérie, as she disengaged herself from her lover’s embrace, “ that is the supper-bell. Let us go up to the house before I am missed and sought for.”

As they approached the house, Frank perceived under the verandah a table covered with crystal and silver, in the midst of which stood several bottles of elegant shape and refreshing aspect. At this table were seated Mr. and Mrs. Basel.

“ Frank Blackthorne ! Frank Blackthorne ! ” shouted the former, as soon as he caught sight of him. “ Where have you sprung from ? I quite expected you to answer my letter in person, but I did not expect you quite so soon. You must have travelled night and day.”

"I have," answered Frank, as his friend rose to greet him. "I don't think the journey from Manchester to Geneva was ever before done in so short a time."

Then Mrs. Basel came forward, just as if there had never been any estrangement between them, offered her cheek for the young man's salute, in the manner of her country, inquired after his father and mother, and asked him to make their house his home during his stay at Geneva.

"Sit down and have some supper, my boy," said Basel. "I am sure you will want it. We live quite in the Swiss fashion, you see—dinner in the middle of the day, bagging—they call it *gotter* here—at five, and supper at nine—and not a bad fashion either. What wine will you take? If you take my advice you will try this Yvorne. Perhaps it will taste better if Valérie pours it out for you."

"If she tastes it first it will," answered Frank gallantly. Whereupon Valérie, with a happy smile and a deep blush, after pouring

out a glass of the limpid Yvorne, touched it with her lips and handed it to Frank.

They sat over the supper so long, that when it came to an end the ladies declared it was time to retire, and Frank, accepting the hint, rose to take his leave.

"Go!" exclaimed Basel. "*Donner wetter!* you will do nothing of the sort. You will stay here all night. We can find him a bed, can we not, mamma?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Basel; "it shall be prepared at once."

"But my things are at the hotel," said Frank.

"Never mind your things. I can find you what you want. We can send for them in the morning. Besides, the gates are shut by this time, and you could not go to your hotel if you would. Come, let us have a smoke and a talk while your bed is being got ready."

"I told you," he continued, as he produced two enormous porcelain pipes, one of which he handed to Frank, "I told you I would win her over. The very moment she breathed the air of

France she began to relent. I could read it in her eye, see it in her manner. But I took no notice. She talked the matter over with some of her friends in Elsass, and I can assure you she got no encouragement from them. The only thing I did was to suggest the other day that, as your father was so anxious for you to be settled, it might be politic, in the interests of Fritz's family, not to throw any impediment in the way. She took the hint, said she did not want to throw any impediment in the way—never had done, in fact—and, so far as she was concerned, the sooner you and Valérie were made one the better she would be pleased. This was certainly rather startling, but I did not deem it expedient to make any remark. The meaning of it all I take to be, that she does not want to have the subject discussed."

"And I am sure I do not care to discuss the subject. I am quite satisfied with the result. Now, don't you think, Mr. Basel, seeing that Mrs. Basel is in so amiable a humour, and we have had to wait so long, that we might be married here?"

"God bless me, Frank, that would be very sudden, would it not? What would your father say?"

"My father suggested it just as I was coming away. He said he would like much to be present at my wedding if it were possible. But in the circumstances, considering what a sensation the trial made, and how often we have figured in the papers lately, it would be well if we could be married quietly here at Geneva."

"Well, there is sense in that," said Basel reflectively, as he relit his pipe, which, in his surprise, he had allowed to go out. "And I really do not see why it should not be as you wish. If my wife does not object I shall not. You will probably not find it very difficult to persuade Valérie. But I am by no means sure that she will consent; women always want so much time for preparation, you know, and some of them would rather have no wedding at all than a quiet one."

This anticipation was so far realised that Mrs. Basel, when the matter was first mooted to her, declared that she could not possibly think

of letting her daughter be married without a proper trousseau. But after a little reflection it occurred to her that Valérie's trousseau had been partly prepared before Frank's supposed death, and when her husband suggested that what was lacking could be purchased at London or Paris as they went back, and that it would be ready on the return home of the bride and bridegroom, whose arrival theirs would precede, she thought the difficulty might, perhaps, be overcome in that way, and finally gave her consent.

As for Valérie, Frank did not find the task of procuring her assent to his proposal a very onerous one. She would rather be married in England, she said; but as Frank wished the ceremony to take place where they were, and her father and mother were willing, she was willing too. Within a month of his appearance at Geneva they were married, and so quietly that the event was hardly known to anyone but the chaplain and the consul, and to those concerned.

After their marriage, Frank and Valérie went up the Valley of the Rhone, crossed the Simplon,

and spent their honeymoon on the shores of Maggiore and Como ; while Mr. and Mrs. Basel returned to England by the shortest route, in order to prepare for the arrival of the newly-wedded pair.

CHAPTER XIX.

GRATITUDE AND HOPE.

A FEW weeks later five of the principal characters of our story (Adam Blackthorne and Rachel, Valérie and Frank, and Valérie's father) were assembled in the morning-room at Brandwood. The bride and bridegroom had returned the day before, and, pending the completion of the house which was being prepared for Fritz and Mabel, were staying at the Hall.

"And now, my lad," Adam was saying, as he laid his hand on his son's shoulder, "you will have to buckle to. I have had all the weight of the business and the property on my back long enough, and now I want you to take your share of the burden. I don't feel quite as young as I once did."

"I know, father, I know. It was too bad of me to leave you in the lurch. You have been sorely tried, and it is my duty to make all the amends in my power. I am ready and willing, not only to take a share of the burden, as you say, but to relieve you entirely—to take all care and work off your hands."

"Softly, lad, softly. The lion's share you may have, and welcome, but not all. As long as I am sound in wind, limb, and eyesight, I don't mean to be idle. Too much work is better than none. I would liefer wear than rust. And now there is another thing I have to say. I have learnt a lesson or two lately. All here know, I think, that I settled Brandwood on Frank and his heirs, and you know how near it went to being somebody's as was neither his heir nor mine. I don't suppose such a thing is likely to occur again ; but, all the same, I have made up my mind to undo this settlement. I never looked at it in that light before ; yet, when you come to think closely, it is about as stupid a thing as a man could well do to leave a large property, the possession of which carries with it serious

responsibilities, to one as is unborn. Who can tell how the unborn will turn out—whether he will not be a wastrel, and so utterly unworthy of the trust? Why should I make my grandson or my great-grandson, that I have never seen and cannot know, better off than my own son? It would be a fine thing if Brandwood could belong to our children and our children's children to the third and fourth generation, and even longer, and I hope it may be so; but if they cannot keep it by their own virtues and their own strength—cannot hold what I have won—let it go to somebody as can. That is the conclusion I have come to. All the same, I shall leave Brandwood to Frank, and ask him in my will, as I ask him now, to leave it in turn, not to his eldest or his youngest, or any other son, but to the worthiest and most able of them. If he does that, the family will last, and what is more, it will deserve to last. Another thing as I have been thinking—and I have had several talks with Basel about it since he came back—is that we should do a bit of something for them as has helped us to rise in the world—the hands, I mean. Frank here shall

have his fling at building some new cottages fit for folks to live in. There is not a decent school in the neighbourhood. We will build one, and get a good teacher. Only one thing, no parson shall have owt to do with it, and then we shall happen keep clear of bother. There is talk of a new church at Moorwell, and as a good many of our hands are churchfolks, and there is no church nearer than Orrington, I have promised to give land, find stones and timber, and be a thousand pounds towards the endowment fund. That is all, I think, at present. No, there is one thing more. I am going to create a special fund for the support of old hands as have served us long and faithfully and are past work, such as Tommy Twirler and Yorkshire Joe."

"Oh Adam," said Rachel, taking her husband's hand in both hers, "how thankful I am to hear you say so! I don't think I have felt so glad since the time you took me home to Walloper Hillock, thirty years since."

"It is worth more than all it will cost to hear you say that, Rachel," replied Adam, with a look that reminded her of days long gone by.

"And now I am going to ask Valérie to do us a favour—the concern, I mean—Adam Blackthorne and Son, you know."

"I shall be delighted, father. There is nothing in the world—nothing in my power—that I would not do for Adam Blackthorne and Son."

"Particularly for the junior partner, I suppose," answered Adam, with a smile. "I am not going to call on you to do anything very great. It is only to christen our new engines—a pair of sixties."

"What, those in the new factory?"

"Yes; they should start next week. But I don't mean to call it a new factory. I have had some of the stones of the old one built into it."

"So it is rather a continuation than a fresh edition," suggested Basel.

"Exactly; that is it. It is new, and yet old."

"What names have you decided to give the engines?" asked Rachel.

"I have decided nothing. I want to know what you think."

"Suppose we call one after my mother, the other Valérie," said Frank.

"Nay, I was not thinking of giving them folks' names. I want something—something—"

"Emblematic?"

"Yes, that's it; something emblematic."

"How would Industry and Perseverance do?" suggested Frank.

"Not so well, I think. It would look too much like self-praise, that would. Come now, Rachel. Rachel shall suggest a name for one, Valérie for the other. You first, Rachel—what shall it be?"

"I say Gratitude," replied Rachel, in answer to this appeal.

"And I, Hope," said Valérie.

"So let it be, then," said Adam. "Grateful and hopeful we may all be; yet gratitude seems better suited to a generation that is passing away, hope more befitting those who are following in our footsteps, and with whom the real business of life is only just beginning. Is it not so, Basel?"

"It is so, friend Blackthorne. Yet would I

rather say, let the two be linked together ; and as you, by building a new mill with stones taken from that which served you so well, and without which we should never have been partners nor our families united, have shown your respect for the Old Factory, so let our children, while full of faith in the future, never fail in reverence for the past. And they will best manifest their gratitude, both in the sense which is doubtless meant by Mrs. Blackthorne and to those whose labours have made life easier and brighter for them, by continuing and improving the work they have begun, by striving to leave the world better than they found it, and a happier abode for the generations to come."

THE END.

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